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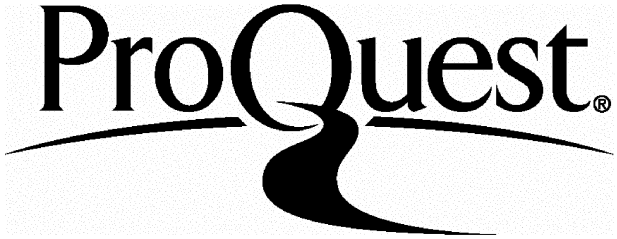
INTERDEPENDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT
Conflict and Stress in the Management and Development of Rural Voluntary Organizations.

Submitted by Alan Worthington for the degree of M.Phil. of the University of Bath, 1985.

A J Worthington



INTERDEPENDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Conflict and Stress in the Management and Development of Rural Voluntary Organizations.

Summary

The present study arose out of my own interest in examining the interaction of groups and systems in organizational life in changing circumstances, in conjunction with a need expressed by the organizations themselves (the Rural Community Councils and the Rural Department of the National Council for Voluntary Organizations) for an independent researcher-consultant to examine the issues of stress and, subsequently, support and training for RCC staff and volunteers.

The research focusses on four Rural Community Councils, which are described as "independent, voluntary organizations", but which, particularly in the last twenty years, have become increasingly dependent on government funding (particularly through the Development Commission) and in the last ten years, with increasing demands for a more professional approach, have employed professional staff. This study involves, therefore, not merely an examination of the developing functions of the Rural Community Councils with respect to clients (and their ability to meet changing needs), but also how these functions have been influenced by political and economic factors, particularly with respect to dependence and hence power, and their position on the boundary between the public and voluntary sectors.

This thesis aims to examine the various influences on organizational life, particularly with respect to stress and

conflict created by the imbalances within and between interacting systems which have differing needs, tasks and degrees of power and influence. It is divided into five parts which comprise, in all, thirteen chapters.

Part One, comprising three chapters, provides a background to the study, including a look at the development of the research itself, its aims, stated expectations and brief biographical sketches of the organizations in the study. In the third chapter, I present an overview of the literature and theory which I have found of relevance to this research, particularly in relation to the way that the key concepts which I use have been used by writers on Organization and related disciplines.

In Part Two, I examine the environmental context - the external factors impinging on the development of the rural community councils and the other bodies in the sphere of the study. The external factors do not have only a spatial dimension - the interaction with other organizations and systems - but also a temporal one, wherein one can only understand aspects of current RCC life through an awareness of history and histories. In order to bring these two dimensions together, I have examined the interaction of RCCs with their external environments developmentally, beginning with pre-history (looking at the roles of public and voluntary sectors in the provision of social welfare in pre-twentieth century Britain), leading onto the inception of the National Council for Social Service (later the NCVO) and the Rural Community Councils and their developments - and declines - up to the early 1970's when environmental factors began to change markedly.

It is this aspect of balance and imbalance in looking at each system in the study - individual, small group, organization or organizational network - which provides the key concept for an exploration of stress, which relates to both growth and breakdown.

Part Three explores the current lives and interactions of the organizations in the study, including an examination of the environmental changes in the last ten years and its effects on organizational structures and functions.

In Part Four, I focus on the internal structure and functions of the Rural Community Councils. The central part of this section is a working paper which was written for the NCVO and the RCCs in the study. It was written as an overview of the issues as I saw them from my own observations and as the staffs of the RCCs, the Rural Department and the Development Commission saw them as discussed in my interviews in the respective organizations. This was intended to provide a discussion point for the sharing of how the issues were seen and hence to be worked through. The chapters on either side of the working paper include discussion of interaction, feedback and follow-up.

In the concluding section I return to a consideration of the key issues of interdependence and professionalism and their implications for organizations (and the individuals in them) which describe themselves as independent and voluntary.

The issues raised about interacting systems in organizational life have wider application than for merely the bodies in this study.

CONTENTS

		Page
PART ONE: RESEARCH BACKGROUND		
Chapter I.	Prologue	1
II.	The Organizations and Groups in the Study	12
III.	Literature Review: A Systems Approach to Organizations in Action.	26
PART TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUNDS		
IV.	Pre-History: Cultures, Politics and Religion	51
V.	The Foundation of the NCSS and the Development of the Rural Community Councils	68
VI.	The Post-War Period	80
PART THREE: CURRENT LIVES AND INTERACTIONS		
VII.	Developments in the Seventies	91
VIII.	Current RCC Life: the County Context; Relations with the Statutory Bodies; Tasks and Functions	105
PART FOUR: RESEARCH IN ACTION		
IX.	Expectations and Interactions	135
X.	A Working Paper	156
XI.	Feedback and Follow-up	233
PART FIVE: CONCLUSION		
XII.	"Independent" and "Voluntary" Reconsidered.	239
XIII.	Epilogue.	252

PART ONE: RESEARCH BACKGROUND

I. PROLOGUE

From March to August in 1983, I had been developing a research project with IBM United Kingdom Limited. In August this ran into problems which meant that it was necessary for me to pursue another project and now with the added dimension of serious time problems.

I wrote to a number of organizations which included the Save the Children Fund, who were undergoing major organizational changes. Professor Whitfield and Ralph Taylor at the SCF were most helpful and were very interested in the idea of their organizational development being researched, but were also wary of the sensitive period that staff were going through and decided that, on balance, an outside researcher might be too difficult an issue. They did, however, suggest that I contact Graham West, head of the Management Development Unit at the National Council for Voluntary Organizations.

The ensuing conversation with Graham resulted in the current project, which developed out of our respective interests and needs: I was needing to look at an organizational situation in changing circumstances, he was interested in having someone outside the NCVO network do some research-consulting work with a group of voluntary organizations called rural community councils and their coordinating body in the NCVO, the Rural Department.

In October 1983, I met with Graham, David White (Head of the Rural Department), and his deputy, Martin Shaw, wherein we discussed our relative interests and needs. My research subject,

to an extent, would be limited (or expanded) by the interaction of the two curiosities or needs and, furthermore, it was also possible that needs may indeed turn out to be other than those stated at the outset.

My first concern was to understand the function of the Rural Community Councils, how they related to the MDU and the Rural Department respectively and, furthermore, how they related to each other.

The function of the RCCs is complex and an examination of this and how it has developed is one of the subjects of this research: an understanding of the stresses within and without the RCCs is in part bound up in the complex nature of RCCs, including functions, cultures, politics. Initially, I was given the "green pamphlet" which is reproduced in the second chapter.

The problem was outlined as follows. Both the Rural Department and the Management Development Unit had been receiving "increasing demands for support and training" from Rural Community Councils who were under considerable strain at a time when the resources available to them had diminished and the demands on existing resources were being stretched. The Rural Department and the MDU were two such resources and they were unable to respond adequately, firstly, as they did not have the experience nor the time available and, furthermore, did not see it entirely within the scope of their respective roles to offer the kind of help that was being demanded. One of the factors in seeking outside assistance in the first instance, was not to blur the boundaries of where their own responsibilities in relation to the RCCs lay, particularly at a

time when they themselves were under the same types of pressure. Secondly, it was quite difficult for the Rural Department to obtain the necessary information about the problems that RCCs were having because of the managerial aspect of their function in relation to them. A discussion of problems by RCC directors was, in a sense, "an admission of failure". The Rural Department, then, was not altogether sure what it was being asked to respond to, and was not in an ideal position to find out. The MDU, with some funds available for training and development, were not prepared to use these limited funds where there was a feeling that the need was not necessarily "training and development".

My task, in relation to NCVO needs, as seen in these initial meetings, was twofold: to identify the nature of the stresses operating within the RCCs, and to relate these to issues of support and training needs.

The aim in relation to my own research project was to explore the interaction of psychological, cultural, historical, political, economic and task factors in the current lives of interdependent organizations within a changing environment, with particular reference to the concept of "stress" as it evolves from a study of the above phenomena.

In using a systems approach to the study of organizational life, the concept of stress is related to the constant interaction of subsystems which make up the whole and must include a consideration of the apparent paradox that they are both autonomous and subject to control, both dependent and independent.

Method and Procedure

It was agreed that we would select a small sample of Rural Community Councils for the purpose of the study. David White and Martin Shaw then produced a short list of eight from which we would choose four.

Whichever four were chosen was not going to affect the outcome of my own research purpose: here were four separate yet inter-dependent organizations with common and yet separate histories, cultures, as well as tasks and functions. The care taken in selecting the right four might, as I pointed out, have a more detrimental effect on the Rural Department's objects, particularly, even if unconsciously, they were "selecting" for a desired outcome. For example, if they chose four RCCs which would present a favourable picture of the Rural Department, they would not find out what some of the more difficult aspects of their own relationships with RCCs were about.

The four chosen were for primarily a small number of reasons: they had recently undergone changes and, in particular, had relatively inexperienced directors who had requested assistance from the NCVO. This was also taken as an indication that they would be conducive to a research project and would welcome some assistance in return. I felt also that their requests for help were also an indication of a favourable relationship with the Rural Department and it was commented to me in the course of research that not all RCCs have amicable relationships with the NCVO, primarily, it seems, that it is felt to be an interference in local autonomy.

A positive response from the RCCs, however, was an important consideration in terms of the study because of the limitations of time and money available for the study. It would not be possible for me to make more than three trips to each of the four RCCs and, furthermore, it would not be favourable for any of them to expect to be giving up more than this amount of time at the outset when they were not altogether sure what defences they were being asked to take down, nor whether it would be worthwhile at a time when their resources are already overstretched.

Three of the four councils in the sample were from David's shortlist. The fourth, Cornwall, I asked about because I happen to have friends there and I spend time with them occasionally. I could therefore, mix the two. It also had the element of adding a "non-chosen" council to the sample, which might highlight some of the underlying reasons of the shortlist.

How the project would proceed was not detailed at this stage as it needed to be flexible enough to allow it to grow according to what happened in action. The plan was, however, that following contact having been made by the Rural Department, I would then make initial contact visits, followed by a more intensive visit to each in which I could interview the central people in each council as well as a cross-section of other personnel. This would, to some extent, be limited by availability at times when I would visit. I would feed back to each RCC after each visit - the precise nature of which would also depend on aspects of response - and, following my second round of visits to each, plus interviews with the Development Commission and the Rural Department, I would write

a paper for the Rural Department and the selected RCCs, which was scheduled for March (1984).

The Project in Action and the Writing Up

My first visits to each of the RCCs were intended to gain a "feel" of what some of the central issues were and these were carried out without a particular agenda. The discussions were general and I was both listening and making space for the RCCs to air their curiosities about what I was doing, express their suspicions and to say what they hoped they might expect out of any such study. I also, where possible, coincided these visits with attendance at council meetings where the internal dynamics were acted, sometimes in ways which were at variance to what was stated, which showed, understandably, a degree of defence against some of the more uncomfortable issues and dynamics.

At the outset, the issue of RCCs being "independent and voluntary" was clearly central to conflicts within and between the various organizations and affects all aspects of their functions and roles. Furthermore, by the end of my first round of visits, although the functions and roles were coming clearer to me, I was very aware that many of the conflicts and confusions were bound in histories and cultures of each of the organizations and that an understanding of the overall background was necessary in order to gain an understanding of the whole.

It was agreed that I would provide a working paper in March 1984 and that it would focus on the material extracted from my

visits to the RCCs in relation to the internal issues for the councils. This working paper (Chapter X) was, firstly, sent to David White and Martin Shaw and then, following some alterations (these are commented on in the notes attached to that part) was sent to the four RCCs in the study for their comments and an invitation for a follow-up discussion to work through, if they so wished, the issues raised in it. It was sent with an introductory section relating it to the external issues and relationships and, particularly the questions of independence and autonomy. This stressed too the need for a systemic approach to the understanding of the conflicts between organizations and the tensions within.

In retrospect, this paper was perhaps too long and detailed, I feel, and it is also rather long and cumbersome for this thesis but, nevertheless, as it was intended to be the central feedback in the action part I feel it necessary to include it here as it was sent. It was, however, only after this paper was sent that some clarity emerged about misinformation or misinterpretation and this in itself is, as this shows, a vital aspect of organizational (and research) life.

The detail about the interacting organizations is not so full: they are not the focus of the study and I look at them only in regard to their relationships with the RCCs, historically and in the present.

Finally, there is the part played by the literature and the use of theory and models. In this thesis I have included this at the beginning, which to some extent reflects the order that I approached the project: at Bath we spent the first term (from

October 1982) focussing on organizational literature. I did not, however, approach this project looking to fit the organizational life with any particular theory, which is reflected in the rather loose structure of the working paper: I tended to write about what I saw. Only in the latter parts of writing up did I come back to seeing how it fitted with the literature background and the literature section of this thesis was the last to be written. I decided to include it at the beginning because of the need to clarify the way in which I use certain terms.

Although the matching of the work face and models came, to some extent, at the end, I did at the outset have a clear sense of the need, as I saw it, to use a systems approach particularly as this would be the most appropriate model (or models) to highlight what I saw as the central issue in the interorganizational life: the interdependence and autonomy issues.

In the literature review (Chapter III), therefore, I have focussed on a systems approach and have looked at other theories in relation to this.

Itinerary of Field Work to Completion of Management Consultancy Project Summary Paper for NCVO

1983:

September 20th, NCVO:	Graham West, Management Development Unit.
October 14th, NCVO:	Graham West, David White (Head, Rural Dept.), Martin Shaw (Deputy, Rural Dept.)
October 28th, NCVO:	Martin Shaw
November 15th, NCVO:	David White

November 30th, NCVO: David White, Martin Shaw

December 6th, Avon Community Council:

Executive Committee Meeting

Informal Meeting, Exec. Committee members and staff

Ann Parsons, Director

December 13th, Staffordshire Community Council:

Simon Smith, Director

Norman Towner, Countryside Officer

Simon Smith and Norman Towner

December 20th, Leicestershire Rural Community Council:

Brian Taylor, Director

Informal Meeting with staff

1984:

January 4th, NCVO: Standing Conference of Rural Community Council

January 10th, Staffordshire RCC:

Norman Towner

Finance and General Purposes Committee Meeting

Executive Committee Meeting

Informal meeting with three Executive members

January 19-20, Avon RCC: Ann Parsons,

John Butler, Principal Assistant Officer

Countryside Meeting

Rev. Howard Brown, Chairman, Executive Committee

Gabrielle Mullin, Countryside Officer

Ann Parsons

January 24th, Leicestershire RCC:

Brian Taylor

Meg Shotton, Deputy Director

Doris Medlicott, Secretary

Brian Taylor

January 30th, NCVO: David White

February 14th, Development Commission:

Margaret Black (Principal, Social Resources and Publicity), and Nigel Bland (Head Executive Officer)

February 21st-23rd, Cornwall RCC (Truro):

Pat McCarthy, Director

Duncan Oliver, Countryside Officer

Avril Baker, Admin. Assistant

The staff group

Avril Baker,

Duncan Oliver

Major Cyril Foster, Chairman

Pat McCarthy

Staff Group

February 29th, NCVO: Martin Shaw

March 30th, NCVO: Standing Conference of Rural Community Councils

April 20th, Working Paper to David White, Martin Shaw

May 12th, NCVO: David White, Martin Shaw (to discuss Working Paper)

June 1st,	Working Paper to Rural Community Councils
June 25th, NCVO:	David White, Martin Shaw
June 28th,	Letter from Director, Staffordshire to David White
August 14th,	Telephone conversation, Ann Parsons
August 20th,	Letter from Ann Parsons
August 28th, NCVO:	David White
September 3rd,	Management Consultancy Project, Summary Paper to David White.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS IN THE STUDY

The Rural Community Councils

One of the initial tasks of this project was to create a picture, both for myself and others, of what rural community councils are, what they do and how they function. Conflicting views of this are part of the underlying phenomena.

I reproduce here, as an introduction, the pamphlet, given to me on my first visit to the NCVO, which outlines the functions, tasks and structures of a rural community council:.

> "A County Rural Community Council: What is it? What does it do? How is it run?
>
> "This leaflet sets the scene and describes the general characteristics of an RCC - but, within the broad framework, every Council's membership, activities and staffing is different, in response to the particular local circumstances and needs of its county. Titles also vary: your county organisation (sic.) may be a "Rural Community Council", "Community Council", "Council for Voluntary Service" or have a different title altogether.
>
> "What Is It?
>
> A County Rural Community Council (RCC) is an independent county voluntary organisation. Its membership is drawn from voluntary organisations and statutory authorities, and the Council is an expression of a wish to meet together to promote a mutual concern for the quality of life in the county.
>
> There is an RCC in every non-metropolitan county in England but one. The first RCC was established in 1920 and the most recent in 1975 and 1979.
>
> "RCCs have a particular, traditional concern for rural communities - for the people who live and work in the countryside. This is how their work began in the early years of this century and, although the scope of their activities has developed over the years to the county as

a whole, they still have a special responsibility to see that the needs and interests of rural communities are not overlooked.

"What Does It Do?

An RCC is in many ways a "background" organisation. Its work broadly is to help others - organisations, communities, individuals - to develop their own resources and potential to the full.

"An RCC exists to:
ENCOURAGE local initiatives, community self-help and voluntary effort, by
- assisting communities who wish to improve their local environments and community facilities such as the village hall and local transport.
- organising the best kept village competition or village project competition.
- encouraging public participation in the planning process at village, district and county level.
- working closely with the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas, with whose work RCCs have a long and close association, in looking at local employment needs.

"BRING TOGETHER AND PROVIDE A FOCUS
for voluntary organisations, and a LINK with the statutory authorities, to share experiences, exchange views, tackle a problem, meet a need by
- convening and servicing a county countryside conference of welfare organisations, federations of amenity societies or other county forum.
- its own committee structure and the promotion of ad hoc conferences and working parties on issues as they arise.
- acting as coordinator of elections by voluntary organisations to Community Health Councils.
- sharing office premises with other voluntary organisations as a 'Community House'.

"ENABLE organisations to operate, by
- providing administrative services on an agency basis for county organisations with similar interests - the county association of parish councils and others such as the county playing fields association, Council for the Protection of Rural England, the county Small Industries Committee and bodies concerned with old people's welfare, natural and local history, the arts - to keep costs to a minimum while bringing the benefits of collective experience and information. (Many of these organisations were pioneered by the RCCs in past years and now operate independently.)
- providing a similar service for newly established organisations who need to find their feet before becoming independent.

"IDENTIFY not only needs in the county or gaps in provision, but possible solutions and strengths to build on by
- encouraging local surveys
- following up issues raised by its member organisations.

"PROMOTE new organisations, activities and ideas by
- helping to establish, for example, volunteer bureaux, councils for voluntary service, a county conservation corps or to develop information and advice services or a village contact scheme.

"PROVIDE ADVICE AND INFORMATION to underpin all these activities by
- newsletters, leaflets, and advice and information on request, for voluntary organisations in the county, for village hall committees, for parish councils and other local groups.
- training and information days
- producing directories of organisations and essential services in the county.

"How Is It Run?

The Council as a whole normally meets only once or twice per year but appoints an Executive Committee to act on its behalf. The RCC will also have other standing committees to promote particular areas of work, with sub-committees or working parties to deal with shorter term topics.

"A small staff is employed to carry out the work of the Council. There will be a Director or General Secretary, usually an Assistant Director, and secretarial support. RCCs also employ field officers ("Countryside Officers") funded through H.M. Development Commission to help RCCs develop their field work.

"An RCCs income comes from three sources: 1) voluntary money including agency fees and subscriptions and donations raised locally; 2) grant aid from local statutory authorities within the county; and 3) central government grant aid through the Development Commission for rural work. The Development Commission places great value on the fact that an RCC's funding is shared three ways, and that the RCC is an independent body able to respond to local needs and conditions. It is an essential principle of the Commission's policy that to qualify for central grant aid the work of an RCC should have the support of the local people and in particular that there should be a substantial financial contribution from the county council.

"At National Level:

"RCCs are affiliated to the National Council of Social Service, an independent body representative of national voluntary organisations and local community work organisations. The NCSS, and its Rural Department in particular, through promotional work and specialist

> information and advisory services, has a long-standing close association with the RCCs and their work in the counties.
>
> RCCs join together nationally in the Standing Conference of Rural Community Councils, which is represented on the NCSS Executive Committee. The Standing Conference provides RCCs with opportunities to represent their views and the interests of rural communities at a national level, and for discussion and the exchange of information."

The above pamphlet was obviously written prior to the change of title in 1980 from National Council for Social Service to National Council for Voluntary Organizations.

In response to the question "What is a Rural Community Council?" it describes an RCC as "an independent voluntary organization". Herein lies one of the central issues in interorganizational conflict and therefore intraorganizational stress: rural community councils are neither just independent nor, in an environment different to the one in which they were instigated, merely voluntary.

These are issues which are central to the exploration in this research.

The Development Commission

The Development Commission was established in 1909, created by Parliament under Lloyd George's Development Fund Act. Its function was to act as "a permanent Royal Commission", advising the government on issues of rural development, as well as in providing grants, loans and advice to non-profit-making organizations.

Today it consists of a body of eight Commissioners who are appointed by Royal Warrant for periods of one to four years. They are not paid. There is also a staff of thirty seven who are

employed under the same conditions and pay scales as Civil Servants. The present Chairman of the Development Commission is Mr Nigel Vinson.

Until the early 1970s, the Development Commission's role in the countryside was primarily to facilitate work which it saw as beneficial to the economic and social welfare of the countryside, much of this being done through the agency of the NCVO, the Rural Community Councils and other voluntary organizations. Its contact with RCCs was primarily through the NCVO and it played no direct role in rural development.

With a recognition for a more direct and initiatory role in the countryside from the mid-sixties, the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (CoSIRA) was formed in 1968 and this was followed by other Development Commission sponsorships, such as the Countryside Initiative Scheme, in 1973. In 1975, following a government report on the depopulation of the countryside and the need for the creation of employment opportunities in rural areas, the Development Commission began an active campaign, particularly through its agency, CoSIRA, to promote the development of small factories.

In April 1984, the Development Commission became a statutory corporation under the Miscellaneous Financial Provisions Act of 1983, which removed practical restrictions and granted it executive powers. In effect it now has a far greater degree of autonomy over financial and policy decisions, where previously this was controlled by the Department of the Environment.

The Development Commission's overall task today is described as the "amelioration of the problems of rural areas" and within this it describes its work as falling into five categories:

1. The provision of advice and assistance to small firms which is done through the Commission's agency, CoSIRA.

2. The financing of factory workshop premises, which is managed by English Industrial Estates. It also promotes a pound for pound subsidy scheme, the Rural Initiatives Fund, which allows rural areas not designated as "Special Investment Areas" (SIAs) to subsidise money raised locally for particular projects. In this it looks to Rural Community Councils to encourage and develop the "local initiatives".

3. The promotion of community development through support for the voluntary sector, primarily through the NCVO Rural Department and the Rural Community Councils. In recent years the DC has dealt much more directly with the RCCs than previously when all matters were fed through the NCVO.

4. The facilitation of the provision of low-cost housing in various ways and, in this, it works closely with the information provided by the RCCs and the NCVO.

5. It advises central and local governments on policy issues with respect to rural areas (Development Commission, 1983).

In 1982-3, advances from the Development Fund totalled £13.2m. (ibid.) and in 1984 this was extended to £21m. (Interview, David White). 39.3% of this (1982-3 figure) was spent on the

construction of advance factories in selected areas, 35.9% to CoSIRA and its work, 12.3% to the voluntary sector, primarily the NCVO and the Rural Community Councils (Development Commission, 1983).

The National Council for Voluntary Organizations

The NCVO was established as the National Council for Social Service (NCSS) in 1919. It changed its title in 1980.

The 1981-2 Annual Report of the NCVO describes its function in the following ways:

> "The NCVO is an independent charity with three aims: (firstly) to promote policies and projects which extend the involvement of voluntary organizations in tackling social problems; (secondly), to act as a national resource centre providing management, information and advisory services which increase the effectiveness of voluntary organizations; (thirdly) to protect the interests and independence of voluntary organizations in relation to the government and other sectors of society".

The National Council comprises representatives of over 300 voluntary organizations, 140 local councils for voluntary service, 37 rural community councils plus a wide range of community organizations and professional associations.

The current Chairman of the NCVO is Mr Peter Jay and the Director (up to the end of 1984), Mr Nicholas Hinton. Internally, it comprises ten departments which are relatively autonomous within the structure. There is an overall executive committee under the Chairman and the function of the committee is to see that the overall policy of the Council is carried out. The departmental structure is represented as follows:

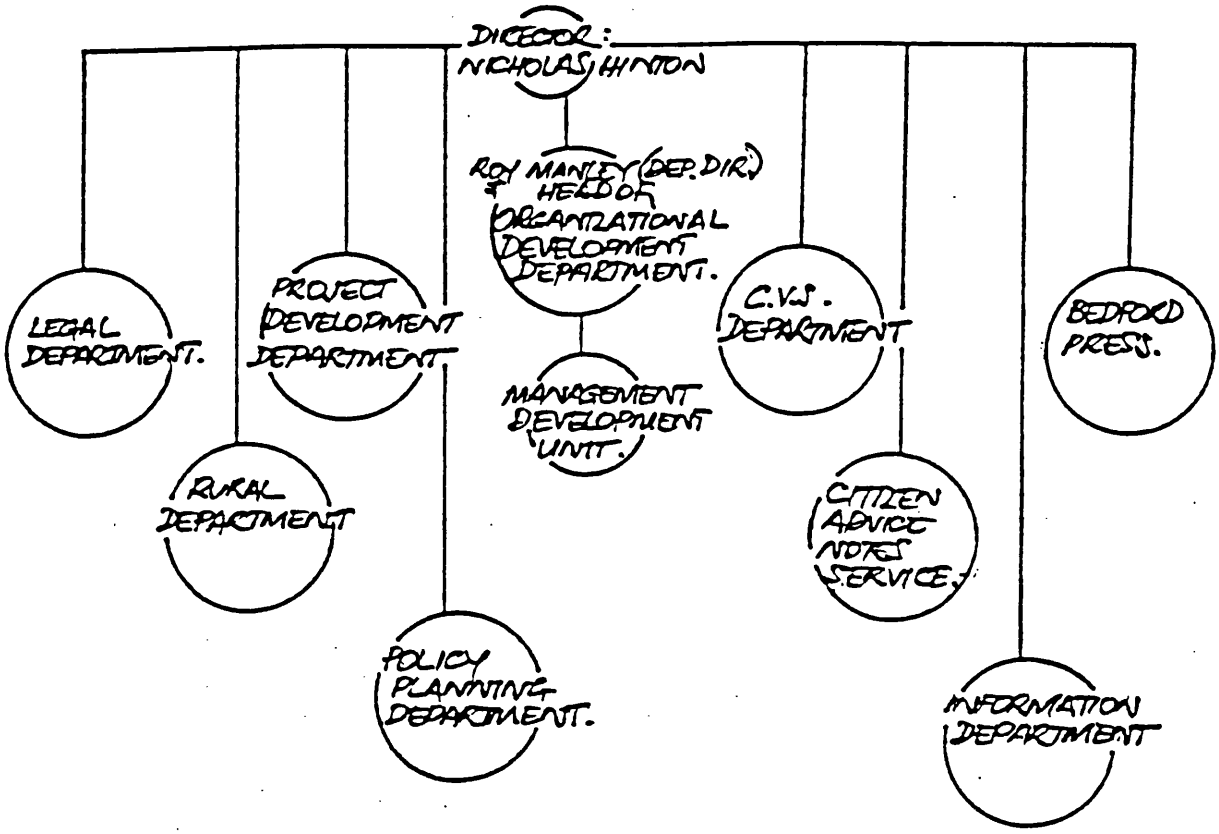


Fig. i: NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

The Management Development Unit

The Management Development Unit at the NCVO was created in 1982 (for an initial period of three years) following the report of a working party in 1981 which was chaired by Charles Handy. This report, "Improving the Effectiveness of Voluntary Organizations", noted the shortage of appropriate management services, courses and mutual help structures in the voluntary sector and recommended the establishment of a department within the NCVO to act "in a brokerage role" in matching organizations with appropriate sources of management help and advice. To fulfill this function the MDU, headed by Graham West, has a total of £75,000 for a period of three

years to provide "a central discretionary fund to assist needy organizations with the cost of management development work".

The Rural Department

The NCSS established its own Rural Department at the outset in 1919, but it has not existed continuously since then. From the early sixties onwards no separate department as such existed within the NCSS, with the rural advisory work being coordinated by H.S.E. Snelsen.

The Redcliff Maud Report on local government in 1969 resulted in pressure from the Development Commission on the NCSS to integrate its rural and urban affairs. This was effected within the NCSS in 1971 when Snelsen retired and the rural advisory work was carried out under the head of the Urban Department, Elizabeth Littlejohn.

As the seventies progressed, the Labour Government under James Callaghan wanted a "more interventionist" rural policy and as a result of this the Development Commission, supported by requests from the RCCs, urged the NCSS to recreate its Rural Department. David White was appointed to head the new department in 1977. The deputy is Martin Shaw, who joined the Rural Department from the Guildford RCC in 1980.

The Rural Department today has seven professional staff, primarily graduates of rural studies and all in their early twenties, employed for their knowledge of rural development issues.

The function of the Rural Department is summarized as follows (in the 1981-2 Annual Report):

> "The Rural Department acts as a national resource centre for voluntary and statutory organizations concerned with social action in rural areas".
> "- it has a general promotional role for issues of concern to rural communities";
> "- it campaigns and lobbies government and other policy making and grant giving national organizations to achieve legislative and financial provision which will go towards improving the standard of life in the countryside;"
> "- it provides an advice, support and information service for members and staff of the rural community councils".

Approximately 80% of the Rural Department's financial support comes from the Development Commission.

The Standing Conference of the Rural Community Councils

In 1971 the SCRCC was formed to provide a forum at national level for county rural community councils. It meets approximately six times each year at the NCVO in London, with the Rural Department providing a secretariat, a function fulfilled at present by Martin Shaw.

The SCRCC provides RCCs with the opportunity to represent their views nationally for discussion, exchange of information and the recommendation of a collective policy, though it has no executive power in relation to the RCCs. Representation on the SCRCC is divided between directors and committee members, one from each RCC, though with the latter providing the vast majority.

Rural Voice

Rural Voice was formed in 1980 as a successor to the Rural Advisory Committee of the NCVO. It is comprised of nine national organizations who have an interest in rural welfare and development, including the NCVO and the rural community councils. There is a county branch of Rural Voice in most counties for which the RCC provides a secretariat.

Its formation in 1980 was influenced, it seems, very much by the restrictions imposed on voluntary organizations who, under law, are not permitted to make statements which may be interpreted as being "political". This is discussed in more detail in Chapter VII.

The Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (CoSIRA)

Formed in 1968 by the Development Commission, CoSIRA is the main agent of the DC in rural areas, replacing the Rural Industries Bureaux and the Rural Industries Loan Fund Ltd.

CoSIRA's objects are "to provide economic development in accordance with the policies of the Development Commission". It is financed by the Commission and provides technical and business management advice, advice on local opportunities and conditions, training in certain skills and financial services to small firms in rural areas.

In 1983, CoSIRA underwent a management reorganization, whereby six regional divisional managers are now placed between national

and local levels. At local level, many of the CoSIRA offices are housed within the rural community council offices, each having a small staff (there are a total of 154 staff in 36 county offices) and each relying on voluntary support.

County Councils

Historically, county councils or local authorities have been one of the prime supporters and beneficiaries of rural community councils. In more recent years, however, this support has been more precarious and at least one local authority has withdrawn its funding of them, which has increased the burden placed on other sources, particularly the Development Commission. The withdrawal of local authority funding has raised considerable anxiety about survival.

Local Authority support has been directed both towards specific functions fulfilled by the rural community councils, for example in adult education, help for the aged, advice and support for Parish Councils, and towards general development and management work in the voluntary sector. When the Development Commission took on the responsibility of paying the salaries of the directors and the countryside officers in the sixties and seventies, some local authorities took responsibility for the salary of the deputies.

RCCs have had to work hard to maintain support from local authorities and relations vary from county to county as well as within counties when there has been a change of council, for example from a Conservative to a Labour local council, as was the case in Avon.

In traditionally Conservative councils where there is a general reluctance, or possibly abhorrence, at the levying of local rates, councils often do not have the resources to give to voluntary associations but see this as being the responsibility of private individuals. In Cornwall, for example, in 1982 the county council provided only 11.36% of the RCC's income, while in Avon in the same year it was 30.65%. The level of voluntary subscription in Cornwall, however, is higher than in other counties.

In Labour controlled counties (and in the lifetime of a Conservative central government), RCCs are often subject to the conflicts between local and central government. In Avon, for example, the Labour council holds the Tory government responsible for school closures within the county which, they say, is the result of national cuts and rate capping measures which leave them with no alternative. School closures are not, they say, a matter of local government policy, but imposed upon them by central government cuts.

It may also be that the background rivalry and tension between voluntary and public sectors also provides local authorities with a target for passing on cuts, especially where the voluntary sector presents a threat in that the government is looking to an expansion of its function into areas that have been provided by public social services. To an extent, we have the reverse situation to that which existed at the end of the nineteenth century when the expansion of public social services threatened the voluntary sector. Furthermore, voluntary provision is seen in many circles as providing an alternative to employment and each voluntary worker is seen as being tantamount to one less job.

There is also a rural-urban dimension to this which is best illustrated by the Avon situation. Inner-city and racial issues have concentrated resources in that county on urban issues which to some extent is seen to be at the expense of rural areas. Problems, as such, are therefore also relative.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW: A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO ORGANIZATIONS IN ACTION

I came to Bath with an interest in relating psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic group theory to the working organizational group setting and the relevance of one to the other. In the course of our literature discussion groups on Thursdays and Fridays, it became clear to me that the limitations imposed by examining organizational life from the standpoint of any particular discipline provided only a partial view, a point made by Emery and Trist (1960) in relation to sections of the Human Relations school from which they emerged. But the same could be said of the limitations imposed on and by Social Psychologists, Historians, Group Dynamics theorists, Gestalt Psychologists, Anthropologists, and so on.

While each of the disciplines has expanded the frontiers of understanding of human and social behaviour, they appear also to exhibit the dynamic qualities of all human groups by tending towards closed boundaries and displaying rivalries with other groups. Some of Bion's observations of groups in action may apply equally to the academic disciplines, it seems.

A systems approach, as discussed by Capra (1982), provides a more integrated model and while allowing boundaries to be defined to distinguish one model, theory or school of thought from another and, at the same time not denying the usefulness of such distinctions, it sees such boundaries as being and needing to be more open so that information and knowledge from one might be integrated and

compared with another. Similarly, this sense of integration applies equally to the thing being looked at: an understanding of the parts must be seen in relation to the whole.

As is pointed out by Durkin (1981), "systems theory", or "systems thinking", means "many things to many different people". It is not my intention here to go into the differing views of what systems thinking means. One of the essential points of controversy appears to be the distinction between 'theory' and 'model' and these terms appear to be used at times interchangeably.

In this paper I use systems models in the sense of heuristic devices in interaction with the phenomena under discussion, rather than as predictive devices.

There are many models used in systems thinking, which does not mean that they are contradictory, but will have different relevance to different situations and phenomena within the organizational context. In this section I attempt to outline what I see as some of the essential characteristics of systems models at least in respect to those which I have found useful in the current study.

A system, according to Von Bertalanffy (1950), "is an order of parts and processes standing in dynamic interaction". It can be either open, if there is import and export and, therefore, a change of components, or closed, if no material enters or leaves it. All living systems are therefore open systems, whether biological or social.

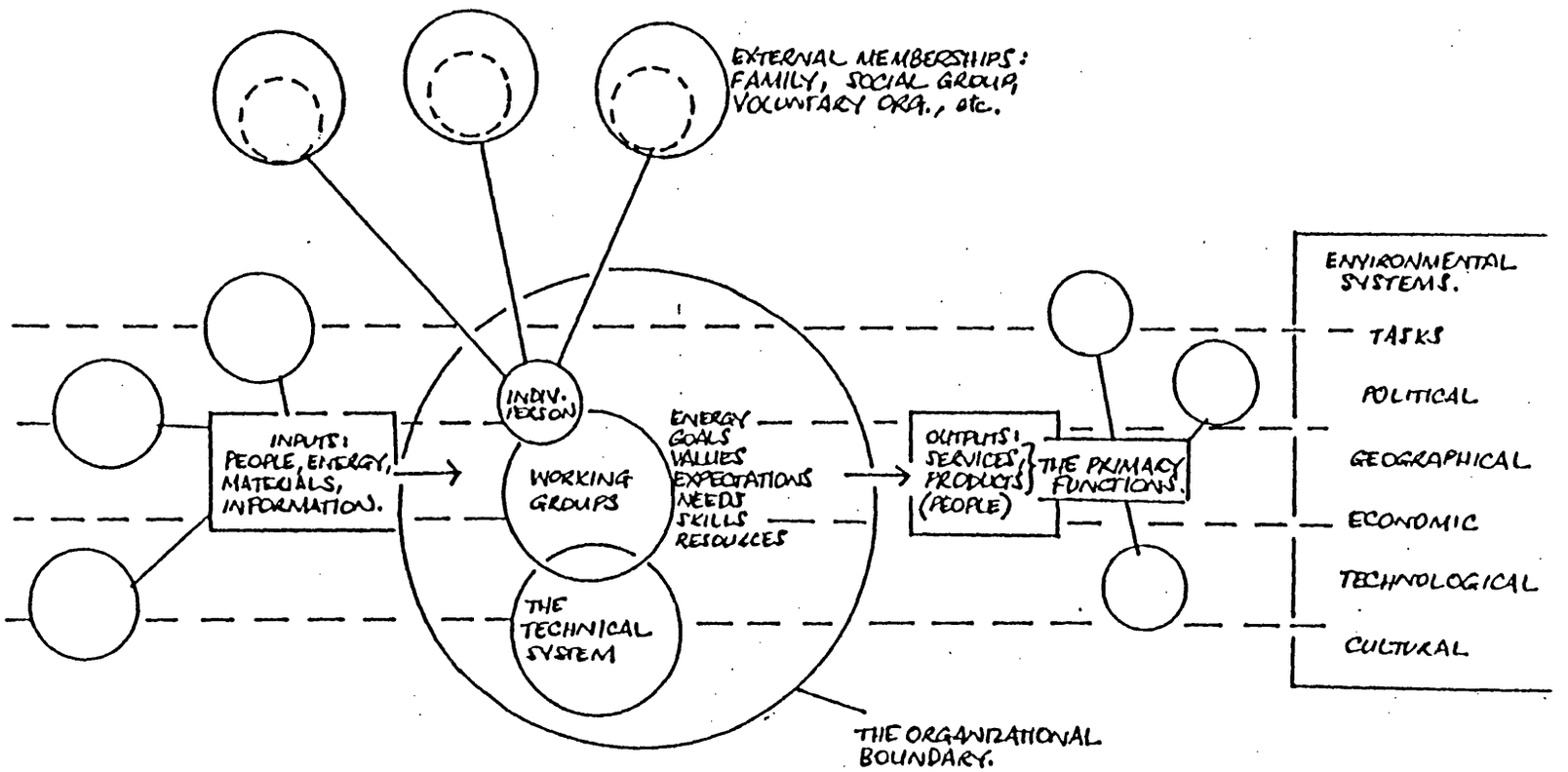


Figure ii. An Open Socio-Technical System.

There has been, according to Emery and Trist (1960), in the realm of the social theory, "something of a tendency to continue thinking in terms of a closed system, that is, to regard the enterprise as sufficiently independent to allow most of its problems to be analysed with reference to its internal structure and without reference to its external environment". This is one of the central issues for both internal and external views of the Rural Community Council.

An essential element of a systems view is the consideration of the interrelatedness and interdependence of the various phenomena.

Systems must be considered, says Capra (1982), as both wholes and parts. Each system is a whole in that it has "a self-assertive tendency to preserve its individual autonomy" (and hence to regard itself as independent), with its own individual task/s and functions, and, within it, its own set of subsystems. Moreover, a system is also part of a larger whole, a suprasystem, and must also be viewed as an integrated part of that.

Only closed systems, in some instances, may not be regarded as parts of larger wholes. Vickers (1983) states that open systems cannot, by definition, be wholes, although this view may be interpreted as denying the paradoxical quality of their being both.

Different models of systems have been developed and these consider different elements which constitute the systems themselves. Such models are not contradictory (necessarily) and the ones I choose here I view as being complementary. One important point

is the distinction between the model and the thing in itself, which also gets confused within the literature. Lievegoed (1969) both illustrates the first point and is an example of the latter: "Every system (I would add that he actually means 'every system model') is a simplification of reality... (and) is a totality of related elements, concepts or variable selected by man... (and which) has a boundary determined arbitrarily by the observer".

The thing in itself, the noumenon, is known only through phenomena and the understanding of it and, according to Bion, is sought only through a living methodology, which takes into account "the state of the person as an instrument" (Lawrence, 1979). This research project is an example of such interaction and within this I am not merely attempting to look at the inter-relatedness as an outside observer, but in the course of research, I am also part of that dynamic interaction, having to consider relationship with it.

Three dimensions of models I have used during the current study are hierarchical systems models (such as used by Agazarian and Peters (1981), Durkin (1981)), a 'lateral' model (my term) which underlines the aspects of outside and inside, import and export, (such as the open socio-technical system model of Emery and Trist), and a four-dimensional model which includes time (and hence history) as an important aspect of organizational life.

The hierarchical model is illustrated by Agazarian and Peters. In examining the group psychotherapy situation, they identify four dynamically interrelated systems whose structure

and function is isomorphically related and whose input and output relationships are such that a change in one system effects change in any other. I think that the carefully controlled boundary of the group psychotherapy situation allows this aspect of hierarchical interaction to be identified more easily than in the more complex organizational setting.

This particular model introduces the terms "group-as-a-whole" system, group and member role systems, and person systems.

The open systems models of Emery and Trist (1960) (organizations as open socio-technical systems), Katz and Kahn (1966) and others, focusses more on aspects of "outside" and "inside", which is in keeping with the comparison of the tasks of organizations as against psychotherapy groups in which an understanding of the dynamics of the group and the individual within it is the primary task. I would emphasise, however, that these models are essentially complementary and not contradictory, and, generally speaking, each includes the characteristics of the other.

Schein (1965), for example, holds that an organization must be conceived of as an open system "in constant interaction with its environment, taking in raw materials, people, energy and information, and transforming and converting these into products and services which are exported into the environment". The essential concepts within this model, according to Schein, is that organizations have (a) multiple purposes and functions, (b) they consist of subsystems, (c) they exist within an environment, (d) there are constant changes within both the environment and the organizations

in dynamic balance with it, and (e), there is a boundary, though difficult to define, between the organization and its environment.

The Environment

The environment of the system is viewed in different ways within different models, although I would again emphasize that the differences tend to be terminological rather than phenomenonological.

Some models use the term "environment" to include the internal structure of the organization or system. Homans, for example, talks of the internal and external environments. Others use the term "environment" in reference to that which is outside the system. Emery and Trist's Open Socio-Technical System model is an example of this, though this model's development was in part a reaction to the tendency for some theorists (e.g. in the 'Human Relations' school) to ignore the technological and its interaction with the social in the organizational setting.

The environment, whether viewed as external or internal/external, is viewed as comprising of different elements and systems.

Rapoport (1974) views the environment of human systems as comprising of two elements: the physical and the symbolic. Homans considers a three-part environment: the physical, the cultural and the technological. Tichy (1980), in studying management and change using the 'life-cycle' model, identifies three interacting systems in organizational life: the technological, the political and the cultural. Webber (1969), looking at the influence of cultural differences in the management of organizations, distinguishes

this from three other systems which interact with culture: the technical, the political and the economic.

Interestingly, the last two examples identify the environmental components themselves as "systems". Furthermore, as it is consistent with systems thinking, the boundaries between these components are somewhat arbitrary and so there is considerable overlap between what each writer may identify as cultural, political and social, on the one hand (the 'symbolic' to use Rapoport's terminology) and the economic, technological, physical on the other.

It is necessary to take some of these environmental components further here as a background to their usage within the present study, but it is also necessary to stress, as mentioned, the lack of boundary between each, while holding to differences at the same time. This is in part an outcome of the way in which we choose to categorize phenomena.

Boundary

Defining the boundary between inside and outside a system is, as has been mentioned, difficult and somewhat arbitrary. Part of the management task is in identifying the appropriate location of this and one source of conflict is where this is seen to be different.

For the individual person system, this task of identifying the 'me' and 'not me' is one of the infant's first struggles, which is central to the writing of Melanie Klein, whose work (particularly the short paper 'Our Adult World and its Roots in Infancy') I have

found most useful. The ego is defined as that part of the self which manages the boundary between the outside and the inside. The boundary is never entirely clear and the confusion in part is managed by processes of projection and introjection (though these defences are not only to do with the location of boundary issues). Such processes clearly exist in the adult as well as in human groups.

For the organization there is also a concept of outside and inside with a boundary between the two over which transactions have to be managed. These boundaries are defined in different ways through, for example, the concepts of time, task, space and sentience.

Miller and Rice (1967) discuss the concepts of task and sentient boundaries and their relationship to each other. The effectiveness of the fulfillment of the primary task - the reason for the organization's existence with respect to the service or product it provides for its environment - can, they say, be only understood in relating this to other needs that it meets for its members, the sentient or emotional.

Where task and sentient boundaries coincide (the clearest example of this is the family business), the inhibition to change, for example, is likely to be the greatest as the group unconsciously redefines its primary task and behaves as if the existence of the group as it is is the reason for its existence. The prospect of change then for the sentient group arouses anxiety and is therefore to be defended against. Frankenburg (1966), using the sociological concept of coincident role sets, makes the same point in relation to small communities.

Energy

The consideration of sentient groups relates closely to the work of Bion as well as the consideration of how energy is used in the organizational (or group) setting, including resistance to change as given in the example above.

An organization uses energy in various ways, but broadly speaking, we can identify two general areas which coincide with its major tasks: energy used in doing work, i.e. that which is available for performing the primary functions, and that which is required to maintain the organization as a system through maintaining a dynamic balance with its environment and ensuring its survival. Energy 'lost within the system' i.e. not available for the output service or production, is entropic (e.g. de Board, 1978; Durkin, 1981).

W.R. Bion (1961) examines the development of human groups in both the psychotherapeutic and organizational settings. In this he postulates that groups in the course of development and under differing kinds of stress, including uncertainty, operate on two levels, those of "basic assumption" (Ba) and "work" (W). In the former, the groups-as-a-whole behaves "as if" its purpose for meeting is other than that stated by its said task. Within this he identifies three kinds of Ba group: dependency, where the group behaves as if it meets to be sustained by a leader on whom it depends for nourishment; pairing, so that two people are allowed, primarily unconsciously, to pair off and create a new "hoped for" leader; fight-flight, where the group behaves as if it has met in order to fight something or to run away from it.

The work group (W) refers to that aspect of the group that directs itself to the stated task. The group, when it is working rationally and cooperatively is like the ego in the individual, mediating between reality and the self, and is influenced at times when overwhelmed by emotions arising from uncertainty, anxiety and stress, which may be related to identifiable factors in the environment, or unconscious processes in the group itself.

In this model, therefore, the energy of the group may be used up in either W or Ba activity. This situation can be compared with the example from Miller and Rice already mentioned.

In some organizational settings, the primary task itself is anxiety producing and the structure may be designed consciously or unconsciously as a defence against such anxieties. Menzies' (1960) study of the hospital situation is an example of this.

Other entropic processes can be considered. All conflicts and ambiguities within and between systems create "noise", a term used in Information Theory (Agazarian and Peters, 1981). In the Field Theory model developed by Kurt Lewin (1951), this might be diagrammatically represented by the forces within the field of an organism at any one time, which either act in the direction of a particular goal or away from it.

A system, then, uses energy in the transformation process both in performing its task and in maintaining its structure in relation to real or imagined forces. Both the technical and the social components of the enterprise use energy. The social (human) system energy is both physiological and psychological.

In a constantly changing environment, say Emery and Trist, living systems, through a process of internal elaboration, grow and achieve a steady state while still doing work, which is to say that they "achieve a quasi-stationary equilibrium in which the enterprise as a whole remains constant" (Emery and Trist, 1960).

Within the social system of the enterprise, this balance with the environment must take into account the cultural and political systems.

Culture

As with all other concepts discussed, "culture" is an elusive concept which is defined by writers in different ways and, moreover, can only be through its interrelatedness with other phenomena. Furthermore, one culture can only be distinguished through the juxtaposition with what it isn't, a point made, for example, by Edward Klein (1979). In another study, Ronald Frankenburg (1966) uses a morphological continuum model to describe a rural culture as compared with an urban culture, a study which I have found very relevant to issues within the current project.

Ruth Benedict (1934) explains culture in this way:

> "No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes. He sees it edited by a definite set of customs and institutions and ways of thinking. ... His very concepts of the true and false will still have reference to his particular traditional customs".

Rapoport (1974) defines culture as "the particular environment in which human beings live" and it consists of both material things

(dwellings, tools, weapons) and non-material things (language, customs, laws, beliefs, attitudes). Rapoport's definition of culture therefore approximates some of the definitions of the environment discussed earlier, rather than a recognisable element within it.

Culler, in discussing the work of Roland Barthes, illustrates the point made by Barthes, that cultures cannot be understood without reference to history, as "history functions as the opposite to Nature". Cultures "try to pass off as natural features of the human condition arrangements that are in fact historical, the result of historical forces and interests". Within cultures, "norms are experienced as self-evident laws of nature" (Culler, 1983).

Handy (1976), in looking at culture in the organizational context, includes within it "the deep-set beliefs about the way the work should be organized, the way authority should be exercised, people rewarded, people controlled". These ways of operating include work hours, the kind of people employed, their status in society, their level of education.

Thompson (1967) views culture from a viewpoint of the interaction of the individual who brings aspirations, standards, knowledge and beliefs, and the situation which presents "opportunities and constraints". It is the culture of the situation "which limits the range of aspirations in a society" and which "highly determines the definitions of worthwhile activities and the methods of success". This is explored by Weber in "The Protestant Ethic and the Rise of Capitalism", and the religious background element is highly relevant to the conflict between the public and voluntary sectors described in this research.

The concept of culture then is complex, but here I am using it with respect to the established beliefs, values and expectations which define, as Winnicott (1980) calls it, the "potential creative space".

When systems or societies meet and overlap, that part which we define as culture in one may be in conflict with that same part on the other. The resultant stress between the two may lead to fight or it may lead to a growth of one or both. This conflict of cultures has been an important dynamic within the Rural Community Councils.

The Political Environment

The establishment and maintenance of a system in pursuit of its task, including the agreement about goals and the coordination and control of subsystems, brings us to a consideration of other concepts which are used in the course of this project.

I use the term "rational systems" with respect to those in which there is a choice as to goals, functions, memberships and which are also subject to the same choices by other aspects of their environments. This applies to all human systems, individual to organizational. Rational systems therefore have choices, but are also subject to the limitations imposed by their environments. Furthermore, rational systems do not display only rational behaviour, but also irrational, either consciously or unconsciously, as illustrated by Bion's W and Ba groups.

The establishment of a relationship between two systems depends on the needs and aims of each in relation to the other and these needs may be material or psychological.

In relation to man, there are different theories and models on needs and motivations, as discussed, for example, by Handy. Maslow, for example, constructed a hierarchical need model which considers, at the lower level, physiological needs, and, at the upper level, "self-actualising" needs (Handy, 1976).

A consideration of differing individual and group needs is important in relating this back to the conflicting functions and expectations of groups, at both conscious and unconscious levels. Miller and Rice (1961), for example, look at the task and sentient boundaries, Bion (1961) and Menzies (1960) on the responses to uncertainty and anxiety within task systems, Frankenburg (1966) considers conflicting role expectations within coincident role sets in small communities.

Contracts and Expectations

At the outset, the reciprocal demands and expectations of one system on another are established by contracts. These can be viewed both materially and psychologically.

Thompson (1967) reviews the theories of Barnard and Simon, and March and Simon, which assert that "the individual's decision to participate in an organization, and the organization's decision to include him, rest on a bargained contract about what each will contribute to the other and what each will receive". This must

take into account aspects of finance, role and function, behaviour, career development and expectations in the future about any of these.

Thompson adds that in modern societies, the content of the "inducements-contributions contract is determined through power (political) processes" (though I would add that this must take into account the overlap with cultural and material systems).

Survival

The continuing relationship of two systems, it would follow, depends on the ongoing interdependence of relative need. The survival of each type of organism, says Schein (1965), "ultimately depends on its ability to continue to be of use to its prime beneficiary". It needs, therefore, to develop "the kind of flexibility and adaptability that may be needed for the organization to survive in the face of a changing environment".

Power, Dependence, Interdependence and Authority

The nature of power and how it is defined is, as those who attended the 1983 Bath Symposium will know, is a controversial issue. According to Emerson (cited by Thompson, 1967), power is "based on the dependence of each party on the other".

Thompson defines power as the obverse to dependence (and vice-versa). He says that "an organization has power relative to an element of its task environment to the extent that the

organization has the capacity to satisfy the needs of the element and to the extent that it monopolizes that capacity". He goes on to discuss differing types of interdependence between organizational parts. These he categorizes as: pooled interdependence, where the failure of one can threaten the others; sequential interdependence, where one cannot act before the other, and reciprocal interdependence, where the outputs of one become the inputs of the other and vice-versa. In more complex organizations and networks, all three are in operation at one time. This is important to a consideration of the concepts of power and interdependence in the current study.

Vickers (1983) relates power to autonomy, which might be regarded as the inverse of dependence. His view is that "the more autonomy (the parts of a system) enjoy, the more extensive will be the power of any of them to block joint action by the whole". This is similar to what Handy calls "negative power".

Handy (1976) distinguishes power and influence: "Influence is the process whereby A modifies the attitudes or behaviour of B. Power is that which enables him to do it". He goes on then to define different types of power, which come under the categories of physical, resource, position, expert, personal (charisma) and negative (the power to block the activity of another part of the organization or system). Position power is most equated with authority, but this too is defined in different ways.

Weber defines power as the "ability to induce the acceptance of orders" and distinguishes this from legitimation and authority. Legitimation, he says, is "the acceptance of the exercise of power

because it is in line with the values held by the subjects". Authority is, in Weber's view, the combination of the two, i.e. power that is viewed as legitimate, and is founded on three bases: tradition, rational-legal organization and charisma (Etzione, 1964). We shall see that in some Rural Community Councils the first two are a source of conflict.

Schein (1965) uses the term "authority" as implying "the willingness to obey because a subordinate consents... and grants the person in authority the right to dictate". Essentially, therefore, authority is a two-way relationship: it is exercised and it is acknowledged.

Roles

The function of individuals and groups within organizations, or the interrelatedness of parts within any whole system must be understood in terms of the role they play in the functioning of that whole. Role Theory, as discussed by Handy (1976) the study of the individual and his roles, provides some useful concepts for the study of this not only in relation to the individual but of systems within systems. The concepts within this are helpful when considering aspects of stress and are used by Frankenburg in his study of rural communities. Kahn et al. (1966) examine organizational stress in relation to role factors.

Stress

I come now to a consideration of stress and its related factors. As pointed out in the introduction, the issue of stress was the central preoccupation for the community councils at the outset of this particular project.

Stress has been defined in many ways and primarily within the bounds of various disciplines, as discussed by Cox (1983). Interestingly, Cox, having made the observation that concepts of stress have been developed only within disciplines, does not attempt to develop an interdisciplinary model but remains within the theories laid down. A systems view might provide an interdisciplinary model of stress.

It is not the intention here to become embroiled in the polemics surrounding definitions of stress, but merely to provide a background to the way in which I use the concept in relation to the current work.

From a systems view, the concept of stress must relate to the central tenet which states that systems exist in a constantly changing environment and that they are constantly undergoing internal elaborative processes in order to achieve a state of dynamic equilibrium with it. Only closed systems achieve a state of static equilibrium with their environments.

Because the environment is constantly changing, it follows that the state of equilibrium achieved by open systems is relative and that, apart from momentarily in time, there is a constant imbalance between the parts of a system which produces a constant

state of stress within it. It is this state of stress which is a necessary condition for the growth and development of organisms as well as being a precondition, where the organism is unable to redress the dynamic imbalance, for dysfunction and possibly breakdown.

This point is made by Handy, where he defines stress as either stimulating (pressure) or harmful (strain). This distinction will depend on the particular situation and the amount of stress which a system can endure - its threshold - before the effects of pressure becomes strain. Some writers only use the term "stress" in relation to above-threshold stress. Everyday usage often tends to approximate this also.

Welford (cited by Cox, 1983) suggests an inverted U-shaped function which takes into account not only the aspects of excessive stress, but also where the demands made are too little. He measures stress in terms of the performance in relation to the demand and concludes that "if the input of stimuli is excessive or insufficient for the individual organism, the excess or insufficiency can be considered a stress". Welford, therefore, is one example of using the term stress only in relation to abnormal imbalance, but where the imbalance can be in the direction of either too much or too little.

Handy (1976) calls the latter situation (where demand is too little) "apathy": for example, where the salience of the task is so low that the individual is not prepared to pay the cost of contributing to the group. Others might describe themselves in this situation as "being bored".

Cooper and Marshall (1978) discuss stress in relation to the individual person, using a P:E fit model (person:environment fit), which does approximate a systems approach. They include within this a discussion of the conflicting role demands and expectations of the individual and his different role sets within the environment.

Argyris (1964) states that organizational stress "exists when the actual giving and receiving loads of the parts are forced to go beyind their threshold" so that there is a disequilibrium in the relationships among the parts. This view appears rather to overemphasise the input and output aspects of systems without due recognition to the cultural and political aspects of the organization within its environment. It appears also to relate only to the strain aspect of stress.

One must also relate the concept of stress to aspects of development and change. Marx's theory of dialectical materialism contains the idea of conflict being at the centre of growth and development, on the one hand, breakdown on the other. Hegel and Marx saw history as a succession of conflicts between abstract opposites (thesis and antithesis), each conflict culminating in a union of opposites to form a new synthesis.

To summarize then, the concept of stress as I use it here, relates to imbalances within and between systems, both as wholes and parts. Furthermore, such imbalances are seen in relation to both the physical and symbolic environments (to use Rapoport's terminology), including social, technological, cultural, political, economic environments, the balance between imports and exports

and the demands of each, the energy systems, the role systems, the task functions and the conflicting views of boundary location.

Furthermore, I relate stress to factors in both growth and breakdown, either within the system or in relation to its environment.

The Present Study

The present study relates to three levels of human systems: the individual person and role systems, the individual organization (the rural community council) and the interorganizational system involved in the task of rural socio-economic development. The latter two are examined with respect to the interaction of their parts, which includes the first (the person and role systems) as well as with respect to their contribution to suprasystems and their interaction with their environments.

Figure iii shows the internal structure of a rural community council, made up of individuals and groups in interaction. Each of these internal systems has a boundary which defines inside and outside, each with its autonomous and interdependent aspects which have to be managed with respect to functions and tasks, inputs and outputs. This system, in turn is part of the next level system and then the one above that. Similarly, each of the subsystems is also part of different hierarchical systems e.g. family, social group and so on.

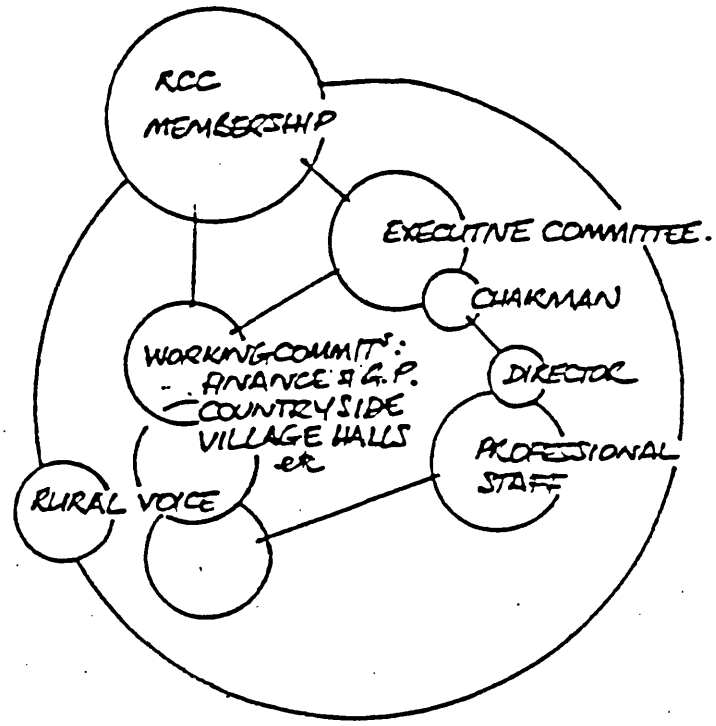


Figure iii: A County Rural Community Council Internal Structure

Figure iv illustrates the rural community council within its immediate environment, within which it defines its "autonomy". Within the boundary of this system, the management function lies with the director and chairman, an issue of this research (discussed in Part Four). Unless the function of the RCC is seen in relation to at least this level of the hierarchical interaction of systems, then the structure shown in Figure i behaves as if it is a closed system, with no interaction beyond its own boundary. If the management accepts a view of a rural community council only as an independent organization, then it can do this only by ignoring the part played in the next level of the suprasystem.

Figure v represents the next level in which the shared task of rural socio-economic development is the common factor, with each part having a role in the function of the whole. Within it there are different subsystems including voluntary and public sectors, local and central authorities, rural and urban bodies. A central issue in considering this model is in the questions "whose is the management function?" and "what are the responsibilities and accountabilities of each part to the whole?"

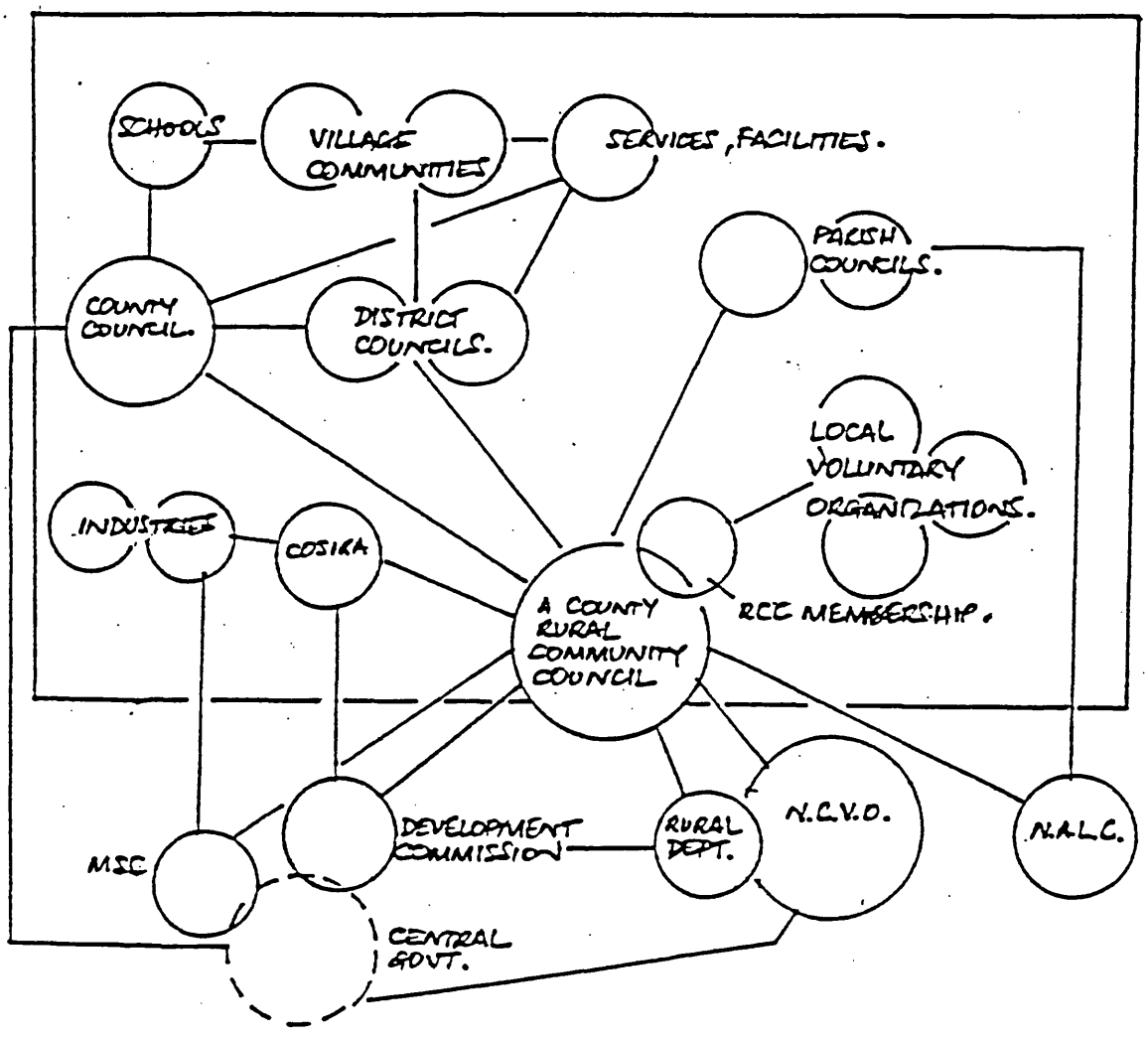


Figure iv: The "independent" county system.

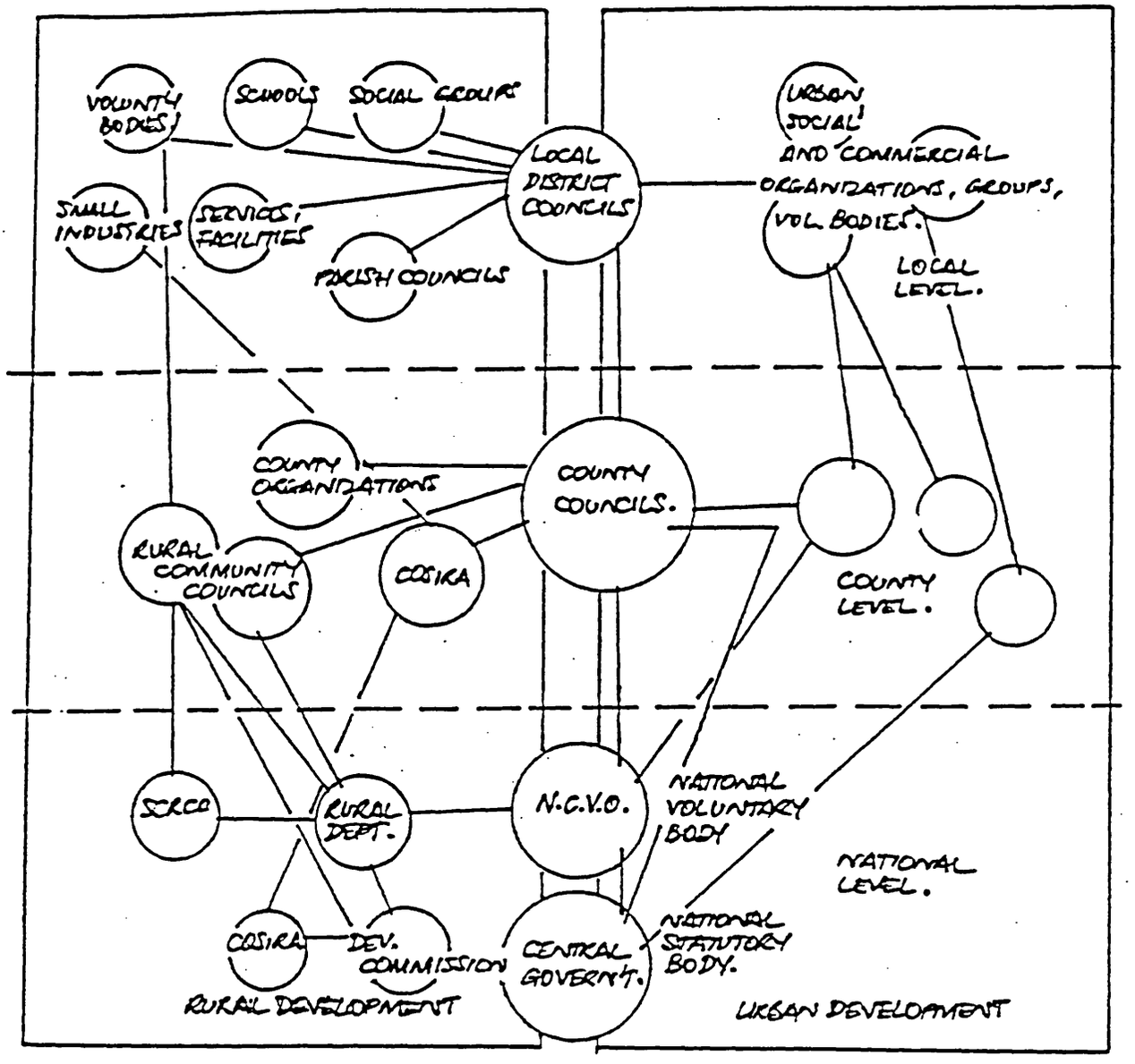


Figure v: An interdependent organizational task system.

PART TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUNDS

IV. PRE-HISTORY: CULTURES, POLITICS AND RELIGION

The interaction of charity with the realms of politics, culture, religion and economics, and each in their turn with the others, is evident in English history from the time of Alfred onwards and, I'm sure, beforehand in what was to become England.

From Feudalism To Industrialism

In feudal times, according to Arnold-Baker (1981), local power was divided between the Lord of the Manor and the Church, each having reciprocated responsibilities to tenants and parishioners within their demesne. Parish and Manor boundaries often coincided and the main part of the parish church doubled as a meeting hall for parishioners and tenants in the absence of any other sheltered communal meeting place. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the parish was the unit of local government and, with respect to charity, the Church and the monasteries administered the only system of unemployment relief.

Following the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century, and hence the main source of poor relief, the resources of local charity were unable or unwilling to provide an adequate alternative, or at least one that could be established at local level without the intervention of central government. The outcome was the Poor Law of 1601, which conferred upon the vestries the power to levy a poor rate on tenant farmers.

In the growing towns of the eighteenth century, the vestries, meetings of local parish rate payers, became increasingly large and so authority there was passed onto smaller committees called Select Vestries. In the townships then at this time, there was the beginning of an exclusion of many from a direct say in local government, although democracy was therefore also to reach the towns earlier. The vestries, handling very large sums of money, were noted for their inefficiency, and often for their corrupt practices. In 1813 more than seven millions were raised in all England for poor rate, while local taxation for all other purposes amounted to only one and a half millions (Trevelyan, 1967).

Religious conflicts also undermined the parish system of government at local level where, particularly with the revival of Methodism, inhabitants were often hostile to the Church on which it was based.(Arnold-Baker, 1981).

The growth of towns also brought with it problems of a new order, which gave rise to concerns about social order and decay. An early combatant of such decay was Robert Nelson, who inspired the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, which formed in 1699. Nelson was a "High Church and Tory" who, according to Owen, exhorted "a Divine Law which imposed upon the rich the duty of looking after the poor". The SPCK attracted wide support for not only were its members of the Established Church, but also Dissenters, drawn to it in its original purpose which was "that of countering Roman Catholic influence" (Owen, 1965).

This movement sponsored the Charity School Movement, which was prominent in the eighteenth century. The need for an educational

provision other than for the children of the wealthy, says Owen, was seen not in terms of mental development, but for the provision of pious nurseries for godly discipline" in which "submission and gratitude to their benefactors" were the qualities which the teaching was designed to inculcate. The breakdown of social order which was seen to arise from the moral decline in towns was the major concern and the responsibility for its arrestation lay in the christian charity of the wealthier classes whose resources of money, religion and time were to provide the backbone of the growth of voluntary movements over the next century.

The motives that lay behind voluntary work and private charity in the eighteenth century were complex, and, as is pointed out by Owen, one cannot make general conclusions about the predominant impulse behind the movement as a whole. Private charity and voluntary work became part of the culture of the wealthier classes for a complexity of social, humanitarian and religious motives. A more cynical view, and no doubt in certain instances true, was that private philanthropy was scriptural, socially admirable and self-protective of the upper classes. Nevertheless, many movements were to be purely humanitarian in impulse. Perhaps most importantly of all, one motive behind voluntary work was that it came to be self-propagating once it became to be an established part of a culture that regarded such actions as worthy, and then for those of the middle classes who either imitated those above or had social aspirations it was adopted also.

At national level over the seventeenth century, landed interests had come to dominate government. From the Restoration onwards, acts of Parliament had restricted the import of cattle

and corn from abroad, which protected agricultural markets for the domestic producer and offset the heavy incidence of land tax. Such protections were adopted singularly in England and were, says Trevelyan, "due to the control of economic policy which Parliament had won from the Crown as a result of the Civil War". The House of Commons was "very much alive to the interests of the landowners, to which nine tenths of its members belonged". Only London and the larger cities were represented on the floor of the Commons by their merchant classes. The Parliamentary boroughs were represented by the landed gentry even if at local level relationships between larger landowners on the one hand, and townsfolk, smaller squires and yeomen on the other, were not harmonious (Trevelyan, 1967). Only the gentry, it would appear, had the time, money and class, all of which amounted to the power to engage in national politics. Furthermore, as indicated in Frankenburg's modern study, the gentry identified nationally rather than locally and are expected, in many areas, to assume positions of authority (Frankenburg, 1966).

While the landlords' personal interests were mainly agricultural, it was not their only interest. Indeed, it was their involvement in commercial and industrial affairs that had given many of them the resources not only to sustain through rural hard times, but had also given them the wherewithal to buy up smaller holdings of those who did not survive. The vanquished moved to the towns while on the land the numbers of landlords shrank as their holdings grew. The years 1810 to 1815 were years of crisis for British agriculture, which had adjusted itself to the high prices of the war years and faced collapse on the resumption of peace.

In 1815, the protective Corn Law was passed with the aim of restoring agricultural prosperity at the expense of the consumer and it was to encounter violent opposition from the populations of the towns, regardless of class. For the next thirty years the agricultural question was to divide England, and "gave a political focus to the differentiation between urban and rural life which the Industrial Revolution was making more marked every year, as the inhabitants of the town lost all touch with the farming, and the inhabitants of village with manufacture" (Trevelyan, 1967).

The animosity that existed between two separate social systems and their different ways of life was expressed in various ways.

Carroll (1984), in a study of eighteenth century guidebook literature, explores the stereotypical images that town and country people had of each other at the time, the one disparaging the other for its naivete and innocence and the other for its roguery and immorality.

Victorian England

By the time of the Reform Bill of 1832, English society was dividing on two fronts: the division between the rich and the poor was becoming wider (the "Two Nations", as Disraeli was to put it), and there was greater division between rural and urban. Trevelyan's view is that the Bill of 1832 and the Municipal Reform Bill of 1835, "taken together, emphasized and increased the differentiation between the social life of town and country which

economic forces were every day making more complete. Victoria's England consisted of two strongly contrasted social systems, the aristocratic England of the rural districts and the democratic England of the great cities".

Between the two Reform Bills of '32 and '35, came the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which had relevance to the relationship between voluntary and statutory provision, private charity, social welfare, the relationship between national and local government.

With the growth of poverty in the rapidly growing cities, the prevalent Victorian view was not that such ills were socially caused, but that poverty was the responsibility of the lazy and morally decadent individual. Private charity, it was felt, was being abused by the growing population of 'professional mendicants' in the cities. Hence arose the concepts of the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor. This view was institutionalized in the Poor Law of 1834, which conceived poor relief in punitive and deterrent terms, under which the state provided 'poor relief' only by entry into the workhouses.

The 1834 Poor Law, according to Sampson (1983), was also to mark the first impact that London was to make on local government in the counties and its effect, says Trevelyan, was to reconcile the countryside with the "old paternal government of the Justices of the Peace", as the cruelty perceived in the management of the Poor Law soured the rural poor towards London government. (The Wolfenden Report of 1978, however, marks 1834 as the end of the 'last phase of paternalism'. It withdrew much of the poor law administration from the parochial authorities and established the services of poor-law guardians.

People entered the workhouses only in the direst of circumstances, and it relieved the individual on the street from being responsible for poverty in the towns, which could not be controlled as it was in the smaller villages. Nevertheless, it was assumed that charity and voluntary provision, through the growing number of voluntary associations and societies, would continue to carry the burden of social welfare in the broadest sense. Schools for the working classes, hospitals and old people's welfare fell clearly into the voluntary sector, while issues of working class housing were approached with similar ideals but were compounded by issues of profit motives.

The characteristics of Victorian voluntary provision then were various. It had descended from the feudal relationship between the landlord and his tenants, reinforced by the role of the church and virtue as part of religious practice. By Victorian times, subscription to charity had become a "social imperative for the upper and middle classes, a convention observed by those who were, or wished to be, anybody". It was, at its most vulgar, says Owen, "a form of snobbism with the comfortably off following the lead of the rich and the rich taking their cue from the aristocratic and conforming to the traditional benevolence towards the poor and the distressed".

Essentially, the conservative view was that social provision for the poor and distressed was a private and voluntary concern and in no way was it to be prescribed by the state. The Poor Law as such was not seen as an incursion by the state into the preserves of the voluntary sector, nor as the use of public money in the area of social welfare. It was a deterrent against its abuse.

With the growth of charitable trusts and voluntary associations in the middle of the nineteenth century, so too did abuse and corruption thrive within them. It needed some control under law which arose from the Charitable Trusts Act of 1853 and the establishment of the Charities Commission.

As mentioned earlier, the divides in society were multi-dimensional. The Corn Laws had divided England bitterly into urban and rural and the question of agricultural protection came to a head in the towns in the 1840's where the cost of bread was high and the poor starving. The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was a political triumph for both the urban population over the rural landlords and for the upholders of a policy of Free-Trade. Furthermore, despite opposition from the farmers and the prophecies of doom, there was no collapse forthcoming either in agriculture nor the economy at large which enjoyed two decades of prosperity and so Free-Trade seemed vindicated, so much so that when the collapse did come with the advent of cheaper foreign competition the mood had swung to one of determined non-interference.

With the growth of towns too had come the genesis of socialist thinking in Britain. In 1848, Karl Marx had published his 'Communist Manifestoe' which had pointed the finger at the exploitation of the working classes by private ownership and predicted the overthrow of the English (first of all) class structure. At a more moderate level other socialist thinkers were no longer seeing poverty in individual failure terms but as inevitable consequences of the cities and the growth of industry. They saw that the state had a responsibility for providing a minimal standard of living and

social welfare for all its members. Charles Booth, founder of the Salvation Army in 1865, devised a plan for non-contributory state pensions.

Some of the more fundamental tenets of traditional voluntary provision now seemed under threat from various quarters. Firstly, pauperism in the towns had threatened to get out of control and in response the number of voluntary associations proliferated. But with this had come the problems of duplication and overlap, and hence abuse, as claimants could go from one society to another. Some form of coordination was needed to control this.

Secondly, the territories of voluntary provision needed to be protected from the encroachments of government and Parliament. Already the Charitable Trusts Act had imposed one form of control and the voluntary sector could see the need for such control but that beyond the laws governing abuses, control must remain independent of statutory control.

Thirdly, the growing strength of socialist thinking was pushing the issue of public responsibility for social welfare. This coincided with a growing body of Liberal politicians who saw the need for an increased public responsibility in social welfare provision even if only it was to abate the growing popularity of socialism.

In 1869, the Charity Organization Society was founded "to replace indiscriminate almsgiving by carefully planned help". Its founder, Charles Loch, was extremely hostile to any action on the part of the state, hostile to the Salvation Army and Booth's plan for non-contributory state pensions, and stressed meticulous

individual investigation in distinguishing those who qualified as "deserving charity from those who did not" (Owen, 1965).

When agriculture collapsed after 1870, the town-bred electorate, says Trevelyan, was indifferent to the decay of rural life for a number of reasons: there were still the memories of the hungry forties when the Corn Laws had made bread dear for the urban poor while protecting the farmer; rural life was associated with an aristocratic and non-democratic system; the rural landlord was equated with his counterpart in the cities who was regarded as "a mere exploiter of other people's labour". The urban socialist, says Trevelyan, projected this view onto the rural situation where, in reality, he says, there existed a far greater degree of benevolence in the landlord-tenant relationship with its greater day to day contact. Such "indiscriminate reprobation", in his view, "helped to increase his (the town dweller's) misunderstanding of rural questions". Nevertheless, when the agricultural working man received the vote in 1884, he voted "in defiance of the squire and the farmer", Liberal rather than Conservative (Trevelyan, 1967).

Trevelyan's view of the rural situation gives the impression that any dissatisfaction tended to come from the towns and in this sense he appears to defend the rural landlord. E.P. Thompson (1968), however, gives an entirely different picture in looking at the rural landlord and labourer relationship, wherein the latter's position was held "at brute subsistence level" while the wealth of the landlords and farmers was rising.

By the 1870s, the Commons was no longer "the House of Landlords" that it had been sixty years earlier. The days of the landlords

and farmers "as the political rulers of England were now gone", says Trevelyan, superceded by the "intelligentia" - and the more recently acquired power of Oxford and Cambridge - both Conservative and Liberal who were "saturated with the Free Trade doctrine" and, moreover, not particularly concerned by the decline of agriculture. Their view was that if agriculture was in decline, something else was in ascendancy and, overall, the economy would look after itself (and them).

From the rural standpoint, Westminster's interests, it seemed, were now primarily industrial, commercial and urban.

By the end of the century, the corn area in England and Wales had shrunk from over eight million acres in 1871, to under six millions and agricultural labourers were flocking from the countryside to the towns and to the colonies. Those who remained saw their economic and social system in decline.

The Establishment of Local Authorities

In 1888 the Local Government Act established elected county councils as the administrative organs of country life in place of the patriarchal rule of the Justices of the Peace (who remained as magistrates to the courts), and this had followed fifty years after the establishment of their urban counterparts. This was followed by the Local Government Act of 1894 which transferred the civil functions of the older parish authorities to new civil institutions, the Parish Meeting and the Parish Council. As a result, the Church was excluded from formal participation in local

government which had always had, says Arnold-Baker (1981), a Christian complexion. The outcome, beyond the acrimony between the participants in local government and Westminster, was that Parish Councils fell into an obscurity from which they would only begin to emerge sixty years later.

The Position at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, voluntary organizations and charitable associations had abounded as a response to the social problems that had come with the growth of the cities, though majority opinion did not regard them as "social" problems as such, but rather as individual failings.

There were now two distinct schools of thought on the causes of such problems and hence on what the response in terms of the responsibility for social welfare. On the one hand, there were those who saw it as a private and voluntary concern, while, on the other, those who saw it as a public and statutory responsibility, a view which had become more popular as the influence of the Fabian Society had increased from the 1880s.

There were various aspects to the distrust that existed between the two broad areas of opinion. Firstly, to the broadly Conservative voluntary sector, "public responsibility" was associated with the general principles of socialism (and hence "Marxism"), which was to be opposed at all costs. Certainly, the force behind public responsibility issues at this time were the socialists of the towns. Secondly, voluntary action was one of the last vestiges

of "independent action", as statutory authorities had encroached more and more into the areas of what had previously been autonomous local government in what were regarded as local as against national political and social affairs. Furthermore, independence of action was a generally accepted advantage of voluntary action in pioneering in new areas of social action, and this was to be defended against from incursions by the state whose boundaries were expanding : would voluntary bodies disappear altogether? Thirdly, "the state", as such, was non-Christian and was seen as having been responsible for removing the Christian complexion from parish government in the Act of 1894. The voluntary sector was dominated by Christian and religious bodies. Finally, for the rural areas, there were additional reasons for distrust of statutory authorities and particularly Westminster, in relation to action (and non-action) over English agriculture and the decline of rural life from 1870 onwards.

On the other side, there was a distrust of the voluntary sector because it was dominated by conservative opinion and the wealthier classes and it was seen to be reiterating the old relationships between the gentry and the poor and that the given order of society was immutable. Moreover, in times of unemployment, every voluntary worker meant one less job.

Nevertheless, between the two extremes of thinking, there was an accepted recognition of the values of the two 'systems' involved in the general area of social welfare, and of the need for some degree of cooperation and coordination between them.

The period up to the outbreak of the First World War saw an acceleration in the emergence of organizations to coordinate the work of the voluntary sector. Already in existence was the Charity Organization Society, which continued to be very active propagating the principles of religious and independent action along with a rigorous investigative procedure to distinguish deserving and non-deserving. It propounded, in effect, a more rigorous application of the Poor Law.

In 1904, the Bradford Guild of Help was formed and represented the first working class and socialist-oriented incursion into the work of the voluntary sector on an organized basis. It marked, says Brasnett (1969), "the end of the old order which rested simply on the assumption that social service was done by a favoured class to those less fortunate". It did not mean that this was an assumption that was to disappear, however. It appealed not only to socialist thinkers for the idea of self-help was also well founded in both Christian and Conservative, as well as Victorian, values. Voluntary action was no longer an upper class preserve with the growth of the Guilds of Help in the north of England, but neither did it mean that now there was to be a compatible partnership between hitherto conflicting parties. An additional dimension to the national divisions is exemplified here also, and that is the one between the north and the south.

The Guilds of Help spread quickly in the north of England over the next seven years and led, in 1911, to the formation of the National Association of the Guilds of Help.

In London the Council of Social Welfare was set up in Hampstead by Thomas Nunn.

The changing public opinion concerning the values of the Victorian era were reflected in the Liberal victory in the 1906 election and growing concern at the operation of the Poor Law led to the setting up of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law in that year. Within it were represented the opposing schools of thought on social welfare, with representatives of the COS in the majority and the Fabians in the minority. The split was reflected in the culmination of two reports, Majority and Minority, in 1911.

The Majority Report, which some viewed as "an exposition of COS views" upheld a "parallel bars" theory of social welfare which propounded that the Poor Law and the charitable agencies had their distinctive spheres of responsibility and each should look to their own sector without encroaching on the other's. Behind this lay a belief that "charity could act more constructively than the state" and in that should remain the mainstay of social welfare provision (Owen, 1965).

The Minority Report upheld Sidney and Beatrice Webb's "extension ladder" theory of social welfare, in which they saw the volunteer as "aiding and supplementing the public authority", never as a substitute nor alternative. This upheld the principle of cooperation between the voluntary and statutory bodies more directly, with an aim to maintain and improve the national minimum, which they saw as being the responsibility of the public authorities. Voluntary provision would operate in the area above such a minimum level (ibid.).

In 1907, the Fabians, the Salvation Army and the National Union of Women's Workers were behind the setting up of the British Institute of Social Science, whose aim was to "promote civic, social and industrial betterment; to collect register and disseminate information relating to all forms of social service" (Brasnett, 1969).

From the Royal Commission there emerged a recommendation for the setting up of statutory and voluntary committees, a Public Assistance Authority and a Voluntary Aid Council, which would represent, in each county, the cooperation of public authorities and private voluntary groups in the joint collaboration of the affairs of social welfare.

By 1911, then, there were a number of coordinating bodies for charitable and voluntary organizations, as well as there being the beginnings of some contact between the voluntary and public sectors. There were moves towards links between the coordinating bodies in order to minimize replication, but the divisions over the fundamental issues relating to religion, public and private responsibility, independence, class, political affiliation, town and country overrode the cohesive factors. Furthermore, coordinating bodies even put together did not in any way represent the voluntary sector as a whole, with a majority maintaining a rigorous independence.

In 1914, as war approached, there was a recognition nationally within the voluntary sector for greater collaboration, and a Joint Committee on Voluntary Service was set up. There were joint secretaries: Dorothy Keeling, originally Assistant Secretary for the Bradford City Guild of Help and then general Secretary of

the National Association of Guilds of Help, and the Rev. John Pringle, secretary of the COS and a Church of England missionary. Pringle, says Brasnett, "used his influence to defend the position of the voluntary societies which he felt were being assailed and undermined by increasing incursions by the state into fields hitherto the preserve of voluntary action".

V. THE FOUNDATION OF THE N.C.S.S. AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCILS

For Britain at the end of the Great War, there was a clear need for an increase in the organization of social services at various levels, particularly as charitable and voluntary funds were unable to meet post-war demands in the way they had before. Arguments for or against public participation were no longer merely a matter of principle.

The National Council for Social Service

The NCSS was founded in May 1919, in response to the need for national coordination of voluntary social services, which had been expressed in the pre-war period but had moved with slow progress. Margaret Brasnett summarizes the thinking behind it:

> "The idea was a simple one: the belief that the rich and varied patterns of voluntary societies, which is a distinctive feature of English social life, is worth preserving; that it could best be preserved if the diverse agencies were to come together into some form of overall federation or council to eliminate confusion and overlapping, and to work together as partners with the newly developing statutory services. It was not a totally new idea. It had begun to emerge in some form in the administration of the Poor Law, the C.O.S. and the Guilds of Help, but it needed to be restated in new terms at a time of rapid social change when the new public services were making an increasing impact on social life" (Brasnett, 1969).

There are various questions that arise from this. It would seem that underlying the stated needs for cooperation "at a time of rapid social change", the underlying motive was possibly more

to do with the fact that the voluntary sector, in reality, could no longer stand independently on its own two feet, as it had done before the war. Its financial basis had in part at least fallen through. Was the concern, then, greater for the needs of English society or the survival of the voluntary societies themselves? Similarly, from the viewpoint of the public authorities, the disappearance of the voluntary sector would result in a task of social service that was beyond the means of the economy.

No longer then could those who believed, such as Charles Loch, that it was the right and responsibility of private initiative and Christian charity to carry the brunt of social welfare provision, maintain this as a realistic standpoint. Furthermore, the view that Britain's social ills were due to individual moral failings no longer held creedence except in the most reactionary of circles.

The first Honorary Secretary of the NCSS was Captain Lionel Ellis. His appointment was followed by the first council meeting in May 1919, in which the "main objectives" of the NCSS were outlined: to promote the systematic organization of voluntary social work, both nationally and locally; to assist in the formation, for that purpose, of organizations in each local government authority, representative of both voluntary effort and statutory administration; thirdly, to provide information for voluntary social workers (ibid.).

Early in 1920, the first Councils for Voluntary Service were established in urban areas, to replicate the function of the NCSS at local level.

In 1923, the national Guilds of Help (or national body) handed over its role to the NCSS and this was followed by an amalgamation

with the British Institute of Social Science. The COS continued to operate, concerning itself primarily with family social work and home visits. Just before the second war, this was to become the Family Welfare Association.

The First Community Councils

During the years of the war, a Rural Organizations Council had been formed to which were affiliated sixteen societies. In 1917, they held two conferences to examine issues such as rural housing, the establishment of small holdings for returned soldiers, the possibilities of attracting industries to rural areas, education, and the provision of social amenities, particularly in the form of village halls. The outlook "was not optimistic", says Brasnett, on the basis that there was no likelihood of outside support, without which none of the recommendations and plans were likely to materialise (ibid.).

In November 1919, a meeting of organizations concerned with rural welfare submitted to the NCSS a report which suggested the need to set up "village social councils", to look at rural social issues particularly now in the absence of functioning Parish Councils. Following this report, the NCSS set up its own Rural Department, under the Chairmanship of Sir Henry Rew, of the Village Clubs Association.

The social and economic position for rural England in 1919-1920 was serious. At Easter 1920, the NCSS held a conference at Oxford, under the Chairmanship of Dr Adams, Master of Balliol,

Oxfordshire resident and, later, Development Commissioner. Present at this conference were representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Development Commission, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust and members of voluntary organizations concerned with village and town life. The conference emphasized that "the main difficulty lay in the fact that for generations British village life had been based on the remnants of the feudal system and that, although landowners and clergy often devoted their lives to the service of their people, the system tended to suppress initiative on the part of the great majority" (ibid.).

Barnett House, Oxford, was used at this time as a library and information centre on social and economic affairs and provided lectures and training courses for social services under a grant from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. Dr Adams was to suggest a scheme to place the facilities of the House at the disposal of the Oxford villages and to meet the need for a coordinated and shared "concern for the welfare of the countryside and the renaissance of rural communities". Furthermore, it stressed "an interest in adult education in the broadest sense as a means to those ends", which had been expressed by representatives of Oxford voluntary groups, particularly the WEA, the YMCA, the Women's Institutes and the Village Clubs (ibid.).

On October 8th, 1920, the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council was formed, according to David White, "primarily at the instigation of the government and the NCSS Rural Department" and it had the financial backing of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust for an initial period of three years, beyond which it was expected that it would be supported by local voluntary funds (Snelsen, 1963).

The Oxfordshire RCC then was a creation of the combined expressed needs of local voluntary groups, the NCSS aim to set up equivalent bodies in local areas and the government, particularly through the Ministry of Agriculture and the Development Commission which "required for some of its projects a link with both village and county organizations" (Brasnett, 1969).

The Development Commission

The Development Commission had been formed in 1909, created by Parliament under Lloyd George's Development Fund Act, and was a "permanent Royal Commission charged with the economic development of the United Kingdom". It was empowered "to recommend to the Treasury grants or loans to government, public authorities, schools, universities or institutions not trading for profit, for the economic development of the countryside" (ibid.).

The Commission at the time interpreted "economic development" liberally to include organizations concerned with social development, "which alone could ensure the variety and depth of living that might arrest the alarming drift into the towns, characteristic of the post-war years" (ibid.).

The Board of Education, in a 1920 report on Adult Education in rural areas, also backed the scheme for rural community councils and recommended that they should be set up on the Oxford lines in each county.

The Rural Industries Bureau

In 1921, the Development Commission set up the Rural Industries Bureau, to look to the improvement of rural industries, through providing "a technical advisory service which helped the rural craftsman to meet the changing needs of the times, especially those which resulted from greatly increased mechanization". Its major effort between the wars was directed to the "modernization of methods and the protection and education of rural blacksmiths". It also "made its mark in the woodworking, saddling, basket-making, pottery, textile and quilting trades". The contribution of the rural community councils was to provide the administrative framework through which these services could be made known to and used by the rural worker. Most rural community councils between the wars, had on their staffs a Rural Industries Organizer, whose role was "to enlist the support of the rural craftsmen in the task of preserving and improving these industries which form(ed) a vital part of a healthy rural economy" (Mess, 1947).

In 1968, the Rural Industries Bureau was to be incorporated into the Development Commission along with other bodies concerned with rural economic development, under the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (CoSIRA).

Functions and Finance

From the outset, there was concern as to whether rural community councils would be financially maintained. It was hoped that ultimately the statutory and voluntary bodies on each council

would find the necessary funds, but even in the experimental stages there was need to support some permament full-time staff and an office. The Oxford project had the support of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust which agreed, in 1922, to extend this to three counties.

By 1925, there were rural community councils in ten counties and, while there were local variations in function, there was a core of common activity. There was, firstly, the coordinating role with local voluntary bodies. Secondly, there was the involvement in small industrial development and, thirdly, there was the focus for local Adult Education initiatives, in partnership with local education authorities and the WEA. The RCCs also organized health education lectures and information resources in conjunction with the Red Cross. Finally, they had become the focal point for the development of local drama and music associations.

In 1924, the Development Commission placed in the hands of the NCSS "a sum of £5,000" out of which loans could be made for the purposes of building village halls, as a response to the expressed need for the provision of a focus "for the renaissance of village life in changed circumstances". By 1933, the NCSS had extended 265 loans through the RCCs to individual villages for this purpose. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust also made grants for village halls and, after 1927, such grants could also be obtained through the National Fitness Council. All were administered through the rural community councils (Brasnett, 1969).

One of the major tasks for the countryside in the twenties was to keep its young people who were moving in droves to the cities where work was more available and the social life more

attractive. The village halls were intended to provide a focus for local social life. Another scheme along the same lines of thinking came from the Ministry of Agriculture which, in 1928, sought the cooperation of the NCSS and the RCCs in forming Young Farmers Clubs, which was again done with the financial support of the Carnegie Trust. This led, in 1931, to the formation of the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs.

The Thirties

While the rural community councils had flourished during the twenties, the situation was markedly different by the advent of the thirties. They had grown and multiplied, not because it was a boom decade for the countryside, but because there were tasks to be done and needs to be met, and, moreover, there was financial backing. The years of financial support from the Carnegie Trust were now drawing to an end and England, along with the rest of the western world was plunged into recession and depression. Moreover, the economic crash of 1929 was in part sparked by the recovery of agriculture in Eastern Europe and so farmers were among the first to be hit (David Thomson, 1966).

From 1928 onwards, unemployment in Britain had been steadily on the rise and the relationship between the voluntary sector and the Labour councils in the towns was not cordial: voluntarism was regarded in some quarters as a cause of unemployment.

In 1931, four rural community councils collapsed altogether. It was recognised that in order to survive, the RCCs would have

to attempt to broaden the basis of their work in order to attract support from different quarters. One area that had been neglected since the 1894 Local Government Act, was that of Parish Councils.

Furthermore, it was now imperative that the rural community councils would have to broaden the basis of their financial support, which would come only from "spreading the risk" between central government, local government and other sources, including voluntary support, fundraising and charging local bodies for services rendered, in approximately equal proportions.

In November 1932, the Ministry for Labour sought the assistance of the NCSS in alleviating the stresses of unemployment, (which in the September had surpassed 2.8 millions) in the promotion of small employment schemes. The NCSS set up a special unemployment committee and, in 1933, 2,300 employment centres were set up (Brasnett, 1969).

For these there was criticism from both within and without the voluntary sector. On the one hand, some saw it as a sinister attempt to buy off the unemployed cheaply, while on the other many saw this as the end of NCSS independence from governmental control and interference.

The years 1932-7 were absorbed almost entirely in the question of unemployment, firstly, as was stated in the NCSS Annual Report of 1937-8, because, amid the controversy, "the tragedy of unemployment was regarded as legitimate business for the voluntary sector", but also, it would seem, that without the business of unemployment, the NCSS and various voluntary organizations themselves might

cease to exist, as many did. The boundaries of independence from public authorities was now blurred by the almost total disappearance of substantial private and charitable sources of funding, which turned the heads of the voluntary sector to government funding if they were going to survive.

The NCSS Annual Report of 1937-8 acknowledged "once and for all" that it was no longer viable to talk in terms of separate areas of function for statutory and voluntary bodies, where the role of "social service" (which was applied then to the purely voluntary role) was to do what the state or churches or political organizations left undone. There was the need for "using the strength and influence of each and all of these forces in a more effective partnership". The NCSS would, from 1938 onwards, follow a policy of incorporating not just the representatives of voluntary organizations on its committees and working groups, but also those of government departments, local authorities and others.

The Second World War

The Depression years followed by the War had various effects on voluntary organizations and their relationships with the NCSS and the statutory authorities.

The threat of collapse for most, drew the voluntary sector into a closer network and those that had clung to their independence not only in remaining independent of public funds but also had remained outside membership of the NCSS, now looked to join forces through the central body. The NCSS now spoke for virtually the entire voluntary sector.

In the crisis of the war years, particularly in London, both the NCSS and the government needed to demonstrate and delegate their respective functions, with central resources stretched beyond their capacities. Furthermore, the government was looking to the voluntary sector to maintain vital services, which otherwise would cease to function. In 1940, the Ministry for Health increased government aid to the NCSS (when the overall available money was decreased) and there was growth in voluntary welfare movements in the absence of equivalent government resources. Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Old People's Welfare Movement date from this time.

There were new demands on farmers and rural craftsmen in the early years of the War, as Britain was thrown back on its own resources for home-grown food without the availability of cheaper overseas produce. Here was, many saw, the legacy of the Free-Trade movement of a hundred years before. In the desperate need for increased rural production, the Rural Industries Equipment Loan Fund was set up through the Development Commission and administered through the Rural Industries Bureaux and the Rural Community Councils.

In 1943, a campaign was launched through the Rural Department and the rural community councils to facilitate the decentralizing of power by improving the powers of, and services rendered by, Parish Councils. Local Government must take the weight of the country's administrative function from a London under siege. The rural community councils would provide information resources at county level for the local parish councils.

The executive committee of the NCSS now saw the need also to relieve itself "of the burden of approving detailed policy in every field of NCSS work by the progressive development of properly constituted associated groups, representative of well-defined fields of social work... which were free to determine their own policy, using the National Council's machinery for the exchange of information and ideas and the affirmation of general ideas and purposes and relying on it for administrative and secretarial services. The types of local groups for which the Council had a large measure of responsibility... should have their own national conferences or groups, responsible for guidance on general matters of policy and organization" (Brasnett, 1969).

Decentralization and loss of contact with the centre (and therefore with other areas through this channel) during the war years inevitably resulted in a great dislocation of the work of the rural community councils in the years 1938 to 1945 and this came on top of the years of depression wherein, from 1930 to 1938, the number of rural community councils had dropped from thirty to twenty two.

When Britain emerged from the War, a new set of social and economic demands demanded new responses and functions.

VI. THE POST-WAR PERIOD

One of the major effects of the Second World War, according to David Thomson, was to create in Britain "a tide of egalitarian sentiment" and a "resolve... to build a better society wherein none should be deprived of the necessities of life, and where the opportunity to work and live in decent surroundings should be open to all citizens" (Thompson, 1965). In November 1942, Sir William Beveridge's "Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services" appeared with proposals for unifying and extending the existing measures for social security and became the charter of the ideals of the Welfare State.

In July 1945, Attlee's Labour Government came to power and swept away the last vestiges of the Poor Law with the establishment of the Welfare State under the National Health Service Act (1946), the Family Allowances Act (1946), the National Insurance Act (1946), the National Assistance Act (1948) and the Children's Act (1948).

Voluntary organizations felt uneasy about their future prospects as to whether they would now have a function where state responsibility now appeared to be all embracing. The rural community councils had struggled to survive through the Depression and the War. The threats to their survival and renaissance were now added to, or so it seemed, by the expansion of statutory responsibility and the continued question of finance. In 1934, rural community councils had received 36% of their funds from voluntary sources, but in 1945 this figure stood at 7% (Brasnett, 1969).

At this point, the Development Commission recommended to the Treasury that grants from central government should be made to establish rural community councils to enable them to provide efficient administration, especially for their services to village halls and rural industries, for the next three years.

As well as the need to decentralize government functions, the war years had also given new powers to parish councils, although at the same time reducing financial assistance. Parish councils had faced extinction in the thirties and in Scotland, in 1934, they were abolished. The decision in England, at this juncture, not to let them perish, led to the establishment of the National Association of Parish Councils. In 1946, there were 2,500 parish councils affiliated with the National Association, which, by 1951, had grown to 3,500 (ibid.). Up to 1951, the NCSS provided administrative services for the NAPC, but in that year it became responsible for its own administration. There was a gap, however, at county level, for an information and advisory service and the NAPC looked to the rural community councils in the absence of an alternative.

The continued provision of village halls was seen as an essential aspect of the regeneration of rural social life after the war. In 1946, the Carnegie Trust allocated a grant of £100,000 to the NCSS for the period up to 1950 for the further provision of village halls. This, however, was to be the last of the Carnegie grants for this purpose, because their policy "had always been to help a new venture to the point where it was no longer an experiment but a service which the appropriate statutory authorities were prepared to take over" (ibid.).

The Ministry for Education was then to make grants towards the cost of village hall schemes through the NCSS and the RCCs, who also administered, on behalf of the Development Commission, the Village Halls Loans Fund, in "special cases".

A new venture at this time was the promotion of and the support for the study of local history which was seen as "being educational" as well as "creating a sense of community". In 1947, a Central Local History Committee was formed.

There was also the position with rural industries at the end of the war where there was a need for an updating of equipment to rural craftsmen as well as need for new premises. In 1946, the Development Commission placed at the disposal of the NCSS £50,000 for this purpose, which would provide money for local schemes on a loan basis. Under the Charities Act, however, the NCSS could not administer this itself and so, at the beginning of 1947, the Rural Industries Loan Fund Limited was formed to administer these funds on behalf of the Development Commission.

In 1952, the Development Commission agreed to continue to support the work of the rural community councils on a more permanent basis, for the period up to March 1961. One of the strongest arguments for this was that for the essential work that they were doing, it would cost much more for it to be carried out by public authorities. Furthermore, with the promise of continued support and encouragement from the public authorities, rural community councils were now developing in most of the counties.

Between 1948 and 1952, two documents were published relating to the role of the voluntary sector in the Welfare State. The

first was the Beveridge Report "Voluntary Action" in 1948, which was followed in 1952 by the report of the Nathan Committee, "Report of the Committee on the Law and Practice Relating to Charitable Trusts".

The Nathan Committee reinforced the view of the continued necessity for an active voluntary sector in the ways that could not be fulfilled by statutory bodies: the role of experimenting in new areas of action; as supplementing provision made by statutory services; to "reach into corners unoccupied by the statutory services"; to respond to emergencies which is beyond the capabilities of the bureaucracy of statutory authorities; to "stimulate, restrain and criticize the proceedings in statutory authorities".

In July 1955, the government issued a White Paper which set out their policy on the issues raised by the Nathan Committee, which was to be embodied in the Charities Act of 1960.

The fifties and sixties were prosperous decades, with Britain restored to full employment and the rate of mechanization of the countryside well ahead of the European average.

Since the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, British Agriculture was, says Trevelyan, "the least protected in the world". For the farmers, agricultural depression had hit hard in the 1880s and 1890s and again in the 1930s. During the Second World War, the nation became aware of the grave consequences of an unprepared agricultural industry, when the country needed to be self-sufficient, but had hitherto enjoyed the benefits of cheaper overseas produce in the climate of Free-Trade.

Following the War, the Labour government was the first to introduce measures to stimulate home production and limit foreign competition with the Agricultural Act of 1947, which was followed by further acts in 1957, 1964 and 1967. The outcome was a set of "deficiency payments" which "guaranteed prices for the farmer, maintained by a government subsidy, which topped up the prices that the farmer got in the market" (Sampson, 1983).

Such measures guaranteed an increase in production from the English farmer, increased their security and, as a consequence, increased the rate of mechanization and improved efficiency. It meant also that he was able to cut down on his labour force and begin another drift from the countryside, which, in the sixties, was able to be absorbed by the need for labour in the cities.

Rural villages began to be populated much more by commuters and so there was a growing tendency for them to service the urban areas rather than, as before, the rural industries and agriculture. The Development Commission produced a report in 1965, "Aspects of Rural Development", which underlined the growing changes in rural England and the moves towards the breaking down of the clear lines of demarcation between town and country. It would seem then that there was a greater need for rural and urban social welfare organizations to work more closely together.

For the rural community councils themselves, life was somewhat more comfortable. While permanent funding was not entirely guaranteed, in the climate of the sixties, anxieties about security were not an issue. Furthermore, they were left to get on with their business with little demand for accountability nor interference from the

NCSS, the Development Commission and local authorities. And, by the end of the sixties, they existed in all but three of the counties.

In each of the rural community councils, the executive committees were free to appoint their chief officers and staff. There appears to have been little coordination at national level (the other side of this was little 'interference') and the rural "department" as such at the NCSS consisted of a Chief Rural Advisor backed by an intermittently meeting voluntary group, the Rural Advisory Committee. The Development Commission had no particular development policy of its own at this time, playing a responsive rather than an initiatory role.

From the War onwards, there developed a practice of employing retired Services officers to run the RCCs. This may have been largely a product of, what many would call, "the old boys' network", but there were practical considerations too, primarily those of time and salary. With the retirement age for services officers at 55, it meant that one could work with a rural community council for ten years before retiring from that post. Furthermore, the salary for Chief Officers was too low to be regarded as a senior person's wage, and so it was more of a supplement to their Services pension. In addition, in the traditional life of the village, their rank automatically conferred upon them respect and authority. And for the individuals themselves, it gave them an autonomous and interesting role in rural life and, if they so chose, one that was not too exhausting.

The function of Rural Community Councils in the sixties revolved primarily around village hall and parish council advisory work, as well as the agency services offered to local voluntary associations, such as the Playing Fields Association, local history groups, music and drama clubs, the Young Farmers, the Women's Institutes, and so on. In the comfort of the sixties, there was little new work taken on and there was little in the way of having to react to crisis demands.

The seeds of what is now being called the "country crisis" were being sewn, however. In 1950, the overall percentage of the working population in the UK engaged in agriculture was 6%, which was to drop by 1975 to 2.7%, when the overall average in the EEC was 7.8% (NCVO, 1980).

Initially, this was to represent a drop in the rural population which was replaced by a commuter population which brought with it urban house prices. Additionally, Britain had an increasingly ageing population and so in popular retirement areas such as Cornwall, there was an older population replacing the younger generation drifting to the cities. The net overall effect for the countryside was to be an increasing population, an increase which, from 1971-9 was 9.5%, compared to an overall increase in England of only 0.6% for the same period (ibid.).

With the drift of younger people from the countryside, the concern was for new employment opportunities, and this was coupled with a concern from conservation groups that the character of the English countryside was not to be lost in either the spread of urban influences into village life (or rather that the village

was to become merely an urban satellite), as well as expanding industrial interests. Furthermore, some of the more intensive and exploitative methods of the farmers were also causing alarm.

The Education Act of 1944 had abolished the all-age village school, which catered for all children from five to fourteen except for those 'streamed off' at eleven for the grammar school. After the war, those aged over eleven were bussed to secondary schools and with the numbers attending the local village schools dropping, many were seen to be too small to operate.

With population changes in rural areas in the sixties also further reducing the numbers of village school-age children, the Plowden Report on Education in 1967 recommended further school closures and a minimum school size (Avon Community Council, 1978).

Organizational changes were happening afoot, particularly from within the Ministry of Agriculture. In 1965, the government set up the Agricultural Review Committee, which removed "agriculture" as such from the Development Commission's task. It also took a considerable part of its staff. The effect was to focus the work of the Development Commission on rural industries.

In 1966, salaries for Chief Officers in the rural community councils were brought into line with Civil Service conditions and to be included in the general grant made by the Development Commission to the RCCs, which was increased by some 80%. The major effects of this were threefold: it increased the security and financial backing for the rural community councils; it heralded the end of the days of the Chief Salaried Officers role being

a semi-voluntary/semi-retired one; it provided the ingredients for an opening of the debate, in relation to rural community councils, concerning the issues of independence from government influence and interference.

There was a growing awareness within central government, the Development Commission, the NCSS and some RCCs for increased responsibilities in the context of the changes occurring in rural areas. The Development Commission decided that the Rural Industries Loan Fund Ltd needed to be expanded and coordinated with other bodies concerned with the development of rural industries, the Rural Industries Bureaux and the Rural Equipment Loan Fund, and these were amalgamated as part of the Development Commission to form its own rural economic agency, in 1968, the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (CoSIRA), with its capital resources and administration separated from the NCSS and the RCCs, though needing to continue to coordinate and cooperate with them.

The time lag between the first symptoms of the coming crisis and a response were due to various factors. Firstly, unemployment in itself was not a major concern in the countryside in the sixties, because there was a need for labour in the cities. So there wasn't, in fact, an unemployed population in the countryside, just fewer jobs.

Secondly, neither the Rural Department nor the vast majority of rural community councils in the sixties addressed themselves to issues such as unemployment, housing, declining amenities, school closures, conservation and so on. In effect, if a village school was closing and the community wanted to do something about

it, they might raise the issue with their MP, but, in effect they had little or no voice and no contact with other groups who shared the same problem. Unlike their urban counterparts, rural communities had little scope for collective action. Furthermore, few people, apart from those who knew of rural community councils via some other means, knew that they even existed and, if they did, would not look to them for support.

Thirdly, there is a view that the people working with the rural community councils were themselves, wealthier and nearing retirement, and moreover often without long involvement with village life and therefore not aware of the changes that were happening, were among the least touched by shrinking village facilities: they did not have children of school age, they didn't rely on village buses and shops, they weren't concerned of the needs for cheaper housing. Hence, there was little personal motivation to get involved in the new issues of the countryside.

Within local authorities too, there was little motivation, it seems, from some quarters to counter cuts in amenities and services in rural areas. Almost universally, local councils in rural areas were conservative if not Conservative and the reluctance to cut services was outweighed by an even greater reluctance to increase local rates. It seems that here too those who had the power to make decisions were those least affected by cuts to services. In 1967, for example, it is estimated (by McLaughlin, 1983) that 35% of all rural district councillors in England and Wales were farmers, represented in the main by larger scale farmers and landowners and who were benefitting most from improvements in agriculture

and a lessening of the workforce. Furthermore, they were protected most of all by low rate policies.

Through the sixties, the Rural Department at the NCSS had gradually disappeared so that at the beginning of the seventies there was only a Chief Rural Advisor backed by the Rural Advisory Committee. Between national and local levels, the NCSS supported a network of Regional Officers who provided a link between one council and another and, like the Chief Officers, were generally retired services officers. There was little or no contact between the Regional Officers and either the NCSS nor the Development Commission. In 1975 the Regional Officer service was withdrawn.

Following the Redcliff Maud report on local government in 1969, there was an increasing interest in the benefits of integrating rural and urban developments from central government levels downwards. In 1971, following the retirement of the Chief Rural Advisor, H.S.E. Snelsen, the rural department's function within the NCSS was integrated with the urban, but to be headed by the urban department's head, Elizabeth Littlejohn. In the same year the Standing Conference of Rural Community Councils was formed with Colonel Humphrey Fox of the NCSS filling the role of secretary.

PART THREE: CURRENT LIVES AND INTERACTIONS

VII. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SEVENTIES

The Countryside Initiative Scheme

With an increasing concern in conservation issues and following requests from three community councils, in 1972 the Development Commission sponsored the setting up of the Countryside Initiative Scheme in a small number of community councils from May 1973. This was to be the beginning of a much more involved role in the countryside on the part of the rural community councils.

Under this scheme, the Development Commission provided funds for a Field Officer/Countryside Officer, whose function was to play an active and initiatory role in rural areas, but with a focus on conservation issues. The significance of this was that now the rural community council would go to the countryside rather than waiting for it to come to them and it was the beginning of the move away from the more traditional function of providing agency services and information for local associations, parish councils and village halls.

It was also to provide the seeds of friction within the community councils. The community councils were hardly likely to say "no" to such an initiative, nor did they want to. Nevertheless, in some quarters at least it opened the old issue of 'interference' from government and was felt by some to have been "imposed on them" rather than developing from within the community councils themselves and, therefore, of their own making. Moreover, the new generation of countryside officers, with their interest in conservation and

a generally more "leftish" viewpoint, did not necessarily see eye to eye with their more conservative seniors. And if the public face of the rural community councils was to be at odds with some of the more traditional elements of the countryside and local government policies (even while maintaining a 'non-political' stance), this had to be managed.

The pressure then seemed inevitably towards greater demands on the rural community councils, and even with an extra pair of hands to take into account the expanding RCC function, it meant an expansion of the managerial function for the Chief Officer.

In 1972, the Skeffington Report recommended a greater degree of public participation in local planning and the Development Commission in subsequent years was looking to the rural community councils to provide the information resources for local community groups.

The European Community

In 1973, Britain joined the European Economic Community. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been at the centre of the tensions around Britain's membership and under it the farmer has enjoyed greater protection and encouragement to overproduction than provided by any of the post-war agricultural acts by the British government.

The special attention afforded farmers under the CAP further increased the divide between agricultural interests, on the one hand, and commercial and industrial interests on the other. It

has also increased the reluctance to provide "further concessions" to rural interests, particularly in some Labour controlled local councils, where there is a tendency still to equate farming interests with rural interests generally. This attitude is also not unknown in the rural areas themselves where farming interests at times see themselves as being, in the traditional sense, "rural life". To many of the larger farming interests, the "crisis in the countryside" is only to do with the possibility that there may be quotas imposed on agricultural and dairy produce, or that a future Labour government may withdraw Britain from the EEC. Meanwhile, other aspects of rural life are perhaps the hardest hit by Conservative spending cuts.

The Changing Role of the Development Commission

In 1975, a Labour Treasury report on the depopulation of rural areas looked to the Development Commission to create 2,000 jobs in the countryside around the establishment of small factories in rural areas. This resulted in the designation of Special Investment Areas by the Development Commission and it also represented a turning point in the DC's role in the countryside. To now it had primarily been a resource centre through which recommendations were made to the government, and grant money could be channelled the other way. From now, the role was to become more initiatory. It also marked the start of "a more direct role in the affairs of the rural community councils". (Interview, Margaret Black).

On January 1st 1974, the Manpower Services Commission was established under the Employment and Training Act 1973 "to run the public employment and training services". Its role was to come much more to the forefront with the Conservative government from 1979.

The Changing Environment

The pressure was now on, both from within and without, the NCSS and the rural community councils, the Development Commission and other organizations concerned with rural development, for all to play more dynamic roles. The need was twofold. Firstly, there was, as outlined, an urgent need for a more active role in preventing both economic and social decline in the countryside, and, secondly, in an environment where public expenditure was (at least seen to be by those in power) having to be cut, organizations drawing on public funds were being made to be more accountable for what they were spending it on. Regardless of whether one's favourite economist was Friedman or Keynes, there weren't resources to waste and this was having to be looked to by the Callaghan government in the mid-seventies as the recession set in, oil prices rose and unemployment with them. Public resources were shrinking and the demands made on them increasing.

With the growing emphasis on partnership between the voluntary sector and the statutory authorities and the greater accountability concerning public funds that were now the mainstay of the voluntary sector, which had replaced private charity and voluntary funding, the demands were for the voluntary sector as a whole to become more professional.

Professionalism in the Voluntary Sector

Hitherto, the image of the NCSS and its affiliated organizations had been "amateurish": the voluntary sector had not been expected to be professional. The first head of the NCSS Captain Lionel Ellis, had been an 'Honorary Secretary'. In the eighties, the Director of the NCVO commands a salary commensurate with his counterparts in the public sector. Expectations with regard to function in the sixties had not been particularly rigorous, at least in respect to professional standards, though, demands on time were great. That is not to say that some of the services were not of professional standard, but the variation was great and there was no comeback if standards were low, publications spasmodic (and were usually printed on roneoed sheets to keep costs to a minimum) and services unreliable. Organizations and individuals, as autonomous and independent, could decide what or what not to take up. Overall, there was an acceptance of what people did, whether this was good, bad or indifferent and there was an appreciation of the fact that they were prepared to work for either nothing or little.

The NCSS (NCVO), the DC and the RCCs

In October 1977, Nicholas Hinton was appointed to the Directorship of the National Council for Social Service and brought with him a more dynamic and professional approach to the work of the voluntary sector in response to changing external needs and demands. Furthermore, the change in the function of the Development Commission to a more initiatory one, saw the need for

a dynamic rural function within the NCSS, an aspect which had become lost within the urban issues.

In November 1977, David White was appointed as head of the re-established Rural Department, "following pressure from the Development Commission and some of the RCCs". (Interview, David White). With this came a much greater emphasis on development and initiatory work, not merely because of a different approach from different people, but because both the rural communities needed it and the RCCs "needed to become more dynamic to survive" (ibid.).

The arrival of the Conservative government in 1979 meant a rigorous public expenditure cutting policy, which included the pruning of government departments which were regarded as unnecessary: "the great QUANGO hunt". The Development Commission itself was under scrutiny here and with this under pressure, if not threat, it meant that so too was the Rural Department (with 80% of its funding coming from the DC) and the RCCs, with some receiving as much as 60% of their finance from the DC. The Development Commission was certainly, at the very least, having to be much more accountable for how public money was being spent, which inevitably would raise the old issue of government interference in voluntary organizations' independence and autonomy.

This aspect of Development Commission involvement in the affairs of the Rural Community Councils was not merely a matter of greater accountability. With its more initiatory role from 1975 onwards, it was looking, says Margaret Black, to the bodies it funded to play their parts in bringing the DC's development policy to bear in the countryside. In the economic sphere it had

executive power over CoSIRA, but in the social sphere its main agent, the RCCs, was a voluntary organization and, hence, "independent" and "autonomous".

One of the significant changes was to come in 1980 with a change in the name of the National Council. No longer was the term 'social service' connected automatically with voluntary work with the expansion of the responsibilities of public authorities into social welfare dating from much earlier in the century. Local authorities now had their own Social Service departments and so, in 1980, the NCSS became the National Council for Voluntary Organizations.

In 1978, the Wolfenden Committee which had formed in 1974, produced its report "The Future of Voluntary Organizations". This underlined the continued importance of the voluntary sector in Britain, but emphasised also the need for a greater degree of 'professionalism' in voluntary organizations with new responsibilities in public welfare, especially in view of its reliance on public money. It was therefore more accountable, but, nevertheless, still needed to maintain its independence in view of its value in being flexible and experimental in new areas of social provision.

With the changes within the NCVO and the re-establishment of the Rural Department, as well as environmental and governmental changes, a change in expectation and even culture had begun to move through the Rural Community Councils. The rural community councils needed to develop to meet changes in the rural environment, to match the changes that were happening elsewhere in the network

of organizations concerned with rural welfare and development (including the expectations of others), as well as to reduce the dissonance within them that had begun to occur since the arrival of the Countryside Officers. Moreover, they needed to expand their function in order to survive.

The initiative for change in rural community councils came from outside them, which, in itself, would be a source of conflict and resistance. Wherever the instigation was to come from, in order for them to change a number of things needed to happen.

The Rural Department and the Development Commission were now looking to a different kind of Chief Officer who saw the need for an expansion of RCC function and had a commitment to that. Furthermore, they needed to have the energy and motivation to expand the function in a direction that coincided with the views of the Development Commission and the Rural Department in relation to what was needed to arrest the decline of rural social and economic life and the rural community councils themselves. An added stress was that the views of the DC and the Rural Department did not necessarily coincide. Furthermore, the Rural Department could not appear, in any case, to be over-supportive of a DC-line, because one of its chief functions was to protect the RCCs, as voluntary organizations, from government pressure. To maintain its own authority, it needed the trust of the RCCs. One insurance policy against any possible over-collusion between the Rural Department and the Development Commission, however, has been the rivalry between them.

Were the views of the Rural Department and the Development Commission so "objective" then? At least the RCCs needed to provide a service for a greater cross-section of the rural population, with wider interests and concerns than those already represented. There was at that time no voice nor infomration for those concerned with the decline in rural schools, post-offices, village shops, doctors' surgeries, transport, jobs and houses. Secondly, however, the Development Commission provided the lifeline and therefore its view of what was relevant to rural welfare was therefore the height of objectivity in terms of whether RCCs might succeed or fail. Organizational death is a most definitive indication of failure if the aim is to survive.

Furthermore, it is not clear the extent to which the rural community council views were at odds with those of the Rural Department and the Development Commission. There was certainly a strong element in many cases of a 'resistance to change', but this may have been more to do with issues of interference in RCC autonomy, particularly from those who offered voluntary service to the RCCs as members of the executive committees.

The major obstacle for change from the outside was the autonomy of executive committees in appointing new Chief Officers and staff. The Rural Department and the Development Commission must have had considerable support from within the executives of the RCCs to be able to effect change. One of the major ways into this was through the Standing Conference which consisted of representatives of each of the community councils and the Standing Conference was aware of the need for change along the lines that were being advocated.

Pressure was exerted from the Development Commission in feeling entitled to "have a say" as to who would be appointed to the positions of Chief Officer, as they were now directly paying their salaries. A direct vote was regarded as stepping too obviously into the area of 'interference' and so eventually a compromise was reached, wherein the Rural Department was entitled to a power of veto on appointments made by individual Executive Committees. This was already implicit in the sixties, says David White, explicit by the seventies, but not formalised until 1983.

A change in Civil Service conditions in lowering the retirement age from 65 to 60, also softened the impact of the change in policy regarding the appointment of chief officers. It was now an easier pill to swallow if a policy was instigated not to appoint chief officers over the age of 55, if it made sense that they would have only five years in post rather than the ten that was offered by the appointment of retired officers. Publicly, this was the reason. More privately, the Rural Department, the Development Commission and many in the RCCs were looking towards younger, more dynamic and more professional directors.

The Countryside Officer role had itself developed through the course of the seventies from their instigation as an "experimental" scheme in 1973. By the end of the seventies, the Development Commission was financing Countryside Officers in all RCCs. Initially it was envisaged as a conservationist role, but in spending their time in the field, the countryside officers would become the eyes and ears of the rural community councils, looking to the needs of the countryside and its issues. In isolated

pockets, rural communities were talking and arguing about their declining amenities and services, but without an awareness that they were not alone.

A New "Initiatory" Function

In 1977, the Standing Conference and the Rural Department initiated a survey of rural facilities in South-West England, through the south-western RCCs and coordinated by Avon: Kenneth Nealon was at that time Chairman of both the Avon RCC and the Standing Conference. This survey report, "The Decline of Rural Services", showed clearly that in the years 1972-77, the number of village shops, post-offices, schools, transport facilities, surgeries and pharmacies had steadily declined in the south-west region. Its report raised issues about "the implications for the future structure of rural society". Through the SCRCC and the Rural Department, the results and implications were brought to the notice of rural community councils in other regions of England, who were then able to look to their own resources (Avon Community Council, 1978).

This, if not new then at least revitalized, sense of national network also produced an expectation that once an issue was raised, then each RCC would examine its relevance within its own county. This in itself was an important development in the interaction (and therefore functions) of the Rural Department and the RCCs at the end of the seventies.

When an issue was unearthed, the Rural Department took on the function of collecting relevant information and advice,

disseminating it to all rural community councils, not just the ones who requested it. This removed "the excuse" that individual community councils had for not expanding their functional boundaries on the basis that they didn't have the relevant information.

The more initiatory and active rural community councils, with their greater involvement in the field, were now advertising themselves more widely as resource and information centres, making village communities aware of government grants that they were entitled to, providing advice on action that might be taken by village communities when, for example, it was announced that their school was to be closed. While under the Charities Act, rural community councils could not themselves take a "political stance", they could put village groups in touch with others who were in the same situation. Collective action by village groups over school closures has resulted in a far less cavalier approach by local authorities who might otherwise apply the chop which would arouse least bad publicity, which is seen to be possibly one of the reasons why rural villages have suffered cuts more than most.

Politics and the Creation of Rural Voice

This expansion into areas regarded as political began to cause problems for some of the rural community councils. As receivers of charitable funds, they were required by law to remain politically neutral, but in many instances a statement concerning the "quality of rural life" with respect to housing, education or transport cuts, might be very difficult to distinguish from a political statement. When issues touched personally those working

for the community councils, emotional issues do not always bring forth neutral statements. In any case, had the non-involvement or the maintenance of a status-quo in previous years been any less political?

The solution was provided in the setting up of a separate group, not centred on either the NCVO or the RCCs, but to which they could provide the services of a secretariat. In 1978, the Rural Advisory Committee of the NCVO, an advisory body with little teeth was terminated and a new body, not affiliated and not restricted to voluntary groups, was formed. Rural Voice was created "in response to growing pressure on rural communities and a lack of sensitivity among policy makers towards the needs of rural areas" (Rural Voice, 1981). This group is comprised of representatives of eight national organizations: the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the National Association of Local Councils, the Country Landowners' Association, the NCVO, the National Farmers' Union, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers and the Standing Conference of the Rural Community Councils.

Most counties now have a branch of Rural Voice, for which the RCC provides the secretariatship. As one Countryside Officer said to me, "writing on behalf of the Rural Community Council, I have to be careful to be politically neutral. But writing as secretary of Rural Voice, I can be much more forthright. It's a matter of choosing the right letterhead."

The essential difference between the Rural Advisory Committee and Rural Voice was that the former was regarded as a "voluntary

body" and hence obliged to remain apolitical. And to make this distinction clear it was necessary to create a new body entirely with the NCVO and the RCCs playing a secretarial role.

The function of Rural Community Councils has developed considerably in the last ten years and especially in the last five. And in response to changing demands and external circumstances, internal structures and functions have also had to develop.

In the next chapter, the functions of RCCs are examined in more depth.

VIII. CURRENT RCC LIFE: THE COUNTY CONTEXT; RELATIONS WITH THE STATUTORY BODIES; TASKS AND FUNCTIONS

In previous chapters, I have looked at the general development of the rural community councils, up to the present time. In this chapter, I examine the lives of the particular RCCs in the study, with reference to individual environmental factors and a focus on their current tasks and functions.

The County Context

The case of Avon stands out from the other three in terms of its historical background, because not only did the community council come into existence in 1974 (whereas the other three councils date from the 1920s), but Avon itself as a county came into being, extracted from parts of Gloucestershire and Somerset with Bristol as the centre. The influences of this particular situation for Avon, in comparison with the others, are numerous.

Avon itself, and hence the community council, has had to combat what has been described to me as a "county identity crisis", whereby Avon associations and organizations have had to fight for recognition and an acknowledgement of legitimacy against the old counties. The task of the community council in the mid-seventies, therefore, was to promote voluntary organizations and associations which were Avon centred. In 1975, for example, the number of Avon affiliated Village Halls rose from fifty to eighty.

Secondly, Avon itself is a particularly urban county, focussing very much on Bristol and, to a lesser extent, Bath, with a relatively small number of smaller village communities. Staffordshire, on the other hand, focusses on its rural life and nearly 350 small communities. Nearly the whole of Cornwall was designaged as a "Rural Development Area" by the Department of the Environment.

The concern of the political groups are, in Avon, urban based and what the rural people would describe as "the neglect of the countryside", has been exacerbated, in the opinion of many, since 1981 when a Labour County Council replaced the Conservatives. The struggle for rural people in Avon, however, is like that of small minorities in other settings.

With such a short history, the financial basis of the community council in Avon is also vulnerable. While each of the community councils I have visited are feeling the financial pressures of the current political-economic climate, only Avon did not own its own office building (or Community House, as they are generally called), and this clearly affects feelings of security and, hence, feelings of powerlessness. This manifests itself in the dynamics of the organization.

The Avon position is usefully compared with that of Cornwall. While the Cornwall RCC itself has a long history from the 1920s, the county itself is clearly at the other end of the spectrum with regards to its 'county identity' which is not merely county based but also almost nationalistic. Politically, Cornwall has a long Liberal and Conservative tradition in politics with little chance of there ever being a strong Labour vote, even among the unemployed.

Cornwall itself has maintained a strong 'voluntary' culture and voluntary organizations are even today more central in the provision of social welfare than are the statutory authorities. Unlike in Avon where, within a now leftist county council, there is considerable animosity towards the voluntary sector which is seen to be in part perpetuating unemployment, the local and district authorities in Cornwall see the fostering of the voluntary sector as part of its own function. So while in Cornwall funds may be cut for essential services, it is seen that this can only be done by nurturing the voluntary sector.

The demands on social service provision in Cornwall too have increased in recent years as it has become one of the more popular retirement areas and an older population has replaced the young unemployed who have gone elsewhere.

Staffordshire, like Cornwall, is also a very rural county with a strong county and Midlands identity. There were a number of comments made in one committee meeting I attended wherein the move of the current director to Gloucestershire was being discussed. By 'going south of Oxford', he was crossing the border.

Unlike Cornwall, however, Staffordshire is marginal politically and this underlines the invalidness of assuming that very rural counties are necessarily politically Conservative. In 1981 Staffordshire had also voted in a Labour council on the strength of its pledges to look to the plight of neglected rural areas.

Relations with Local Authorities

In each of the community councils, the degree of harmony with the local authorities is clearly an important factor, and the causes of disharmony are numerous and two-directional.

In Cornwall and Avon, for example, much emphasis was placed on "the old boys' network" which is also clearly operational still in the other two. In Avon this network had an enormous influence on the county council-community council relationship in the change of government in 1981. According to John Butler, the Principal Assistant, the Chairman and the Secretary of the RCC up to 1980 regarded themselves as personal friends of the leader of the County Council and so all the negotiating between the RCC and the Authority was done by 'the network' and RCC financing was secure: the decisions regarding the RCC were handed down from the top at the Council, which caused considerable ill-feeling in the Community Leisure Department, which was where RCC funding was coming from. When the change of leadership came in 1981, the Chairman of the RCC then had to deal with the Community Leisure Department and, says John, it was only after the new Chairman and Director to the RCC were appointed that the relationship began to improve, although commitment to the RCC within the County Council is tenuous.

The Labour Council in Avon is currently one of the local authorities most in the centre of the target of central government rate capping legislation with a current overspend of £30 million. Furthermore, with all but one of the elected members of the council representing urban wards, the priority is with the needs of the inner-city population. So while the pressure on rural communities

is therefore increased, and hence the demands on the RCC increased, the RCC itself is having to cope with such demand while also having to fight for continued support of the county council. In the last four years, the county council at Bristol has cut funding to the RCC by "over 25%" and has also withdrawn its specific financing of the salary of the Principal Assistant. It has also cut all grant-aid to village halls in the county, which has increased the pressure from village halls on the RCC for support from other sources, such as the Development Commission and the Manpower Services Commission. In none of the other RCCs had the local authority cut the funding of either RCCs or village halls.

In Leicestershire there is also a Labour County Council and the director of the RCC there says that they "enjoy a good relationship". In contrast with the position in Avon, in 1983 the Leicestershire council supported nine village hall projects with grant-aid which totalled over £33,000. Furthermore, the RCC and the County Council have reached "a satisfactory agreement" over both its general grant to the RCC and the salary of the Deputy Director.

Like Avon, Staffordshire had also had a change of local government from Conservative to Labour in 1981, but the RCC is now appreciating the energy of a much younger county council which is more actively involved in the issues of the countryside than the one before it. The Chairman of the County Council in Stafford is also President of the RCC Executive Committee and so there is considerable cooperation between the two bodies.

The Cornwall situation is somewhat akin to the Avon one prior to the 1981 council changes. Here the "old boy network", according to Duncan Oliver, the Countryside Officer, is alive and well and, he says, also very useful. Furthermore, the Director at Cornwall has fostered the involvement of the county and district councils on the RCC executive committee and this keeps them working cohesively. This involvement of statutory bodies' representatives on RCC executive committees seems a crucial one and those that continue to exclude statutory representation on committees for fear of 'interference' appear to suffer.

Relations with the Development Commission

While one would expect that the relationships of each RCC with the Development Commission to be less varied than in the case of local authorities, there are, nevertheless variations.

The background to DC support for RCCs is discussed elsewhere, and today the basis of DC funding comes under different headings. The basic funding by the DC of rural community councils is relatively uniform, in that it provides a general grant to each RCC on top of providing the salaries for the Director and the Countryside Officer. The general grant, in a minor way, appears to vary according to the grading of the council - A, B or C according to 'rural variables' - which is designated by the Development Commission.

This grading of counties is much more significant in assessing two other sources of DC funding: the Rural Initiatives Fund and the Special Investment Areas (previously the Rural Development Areas).

The Rural Initiatives Fund (RIF) was established by the Development Commission in 1981 as an incentive to RCCs to raise voluntary funds as well as to provide a source of support. Sources of funds raised by RCCs are subsidised by the Development Commission according to the county grading. Avon, for example, is subsidised 30p in the pound as a Group C county, while Leicestershire is subsidised 45p in the pound as a Group B county. Inevitably, and particularly in a county such as Avon where finance is a delicate issue, feelings of 'unfairness' arise about the grading system.

The Department of the Environment has designated some rural areas as Special Investment Areas (SIAs) and these are the focus of the Development Commission's own direct action in the countryside. For approved projects within SIAs, the Development Commission offers up to 35% grants of up to £50,000 for the conversion of barns into workshops or factories, which is managed through the joint functioning of the RCCs and CoSIRA, as well as up to 40% for the cost of other approved projects. Most of Cornwall is designated "SIA", something which the RCC has been careful to maintain, while the Moors Development Project in Staffordshire has been one of the DC's pet SIA projects.

Here too one detects an irony in the system: the RCCs have considerable financial stress alleviated if they are managing SIAs on behalf of the Development Commission. If they do this well enough for that area not to continue to be a SIA, they therefore make life difficult for themselves. Here then is a central stress in which the primary task may be counter to the task of organizational survival.

Relations between the DC and individual RCCs appear to have become more strained in many cases as the DC proportion of support has increased. From the viewpoint of the RCCs, or parts of them, there is a feeling of increased interference from the DC, while the DC is opposed to 'funding irrelevant work' or even voluntary work that is not contributing to its own definition of rural development . On the whole, the directors and staffs of the RCCs I visited were in agreement with the DC policy and opposition tends to come more from the executive committees and volunteers where the function of the RCCs still tends to be seen as primarily a servicing agency for the voluntary organizations. Moreover, the DC initiatory policy is felt to threaten the autonomy and authority of longer established committees.

The Development Commission, however, is seen by some to be seeing things in rather black and white terms which is exacerbated by its lack of contact with what is happening in the RCCs themselves. Cornwall provides a good illustration. Relations between the RCC in Truro and the DC became strained over the proportion of voluntary work that the RCC was involved in and, while the RCC supported the DC general policy, it was critical of the DC's lack of understanding of the situation. Firstly, there is the place of voluntary provision in the Cornish culture, whereby a severe cutting back of the support given by the RCC in this would be detrimental to all aspects of the RCC's work, particularly its development work and its coordination with the county and district councils. Secondly, it was felt that merely assessing the proportion of staff time on either 'voluntary' or 'development' work did not reflect accurately the input of the RCC as a whole because, within

the Cornish RCC, there is an actively involved voluntary support system to whom much development work is delegated and, because of the high number of retired professional people in Cornwall, this voluntary support is often of the highest calibre.

Ultimately, the RCC and the DC (towards the end of last year) reached an agreed formula about the proportion of traditional and developmental work that staff time involves. Duncan Oliver assesses this as being "about 60% voluntary to about 40% development". Duncan had come to the Cornwall RCC from Nottingham where, he says, "eighty to ninety percent of the work is developmental".

The Development Commission itself appears to have little interest in supporting the voluntary work of the RCCs and, says Margaret Black, would like to see them do away with their agency work altogether. Even though, however, the RCC in Cornwall and the DC have reached an 'agreed formula' about their voluntary work, it appears from tensions and animosities over DC support from project proposals, that a more favourable stance may be taken, in decision making for funding, towards RCCs which take a more DC-orientated line.

Apart from Staffordshire RCC, which has had "a lot of regular contact with and visits from the DC with respect to the Moors Project", each of the other RCCs only see the DC on their three yearly visits with the NCVO, which produces a mixed response. On the one hand there is an agreement that the Development Commission is "out of touch" with the community councils and, hence, many aspects of rural life, there was also a feeling that less contact also meant "less interference". Within the staff groups,

however, the overriding attitude was that given that the Development Commission does have so much power in decision-making with regards the countryside, it needed to be more in touch with what was happening, particularly as staff changes in the DC were tending to strengthen the economists' side at the expense of knowledge about rural issues.

The Functions of the RCCs

The functions of the Rural Community Councils can be divided in a number of ways, but the most commonly practised distinction appears to be between the 'traditional' (or 'voluntary') function and the 'development' work. Within these two broad categories, there is also the distinction made between the 'responsive' and 'initiatory' functions, as well as that between the consultative and active roles, a distinction which the RCCs appear to find difficult to make.

The Voluntary and Traditional Work

(i) Free Advice and Information

The voluntary function can be divided into several sub-divisions. Firstly, there is the free service that is offered by the RCC itself to rural communities: free advice and information to individuals and organizations, particularly information regarding the running of voluntary organizations and small businesses, or with regard to aspects of rural village life.

(ii) Development of the Voluntary Sector

Secondly, the RCCs exist to encourage the development of voluntary organizations and associations in rural areas. The stress on this function seems to depend very much on the stage of development of both the RCC and the county organizations and might be regarded as a survival function related to organizational self-preservation than with primary task. Perhaps a valid question is whether the RCCs develop voluntary organizations to exist, rather than that they exist to develop voluntary organizations. Nevertheless, given a recognition of the need for a voluntary sector, a function of the RCCs is to assist in the development of this and this type of question can surely be asked of most organizations?

There appears also to be a status issue which is related to the number of voluntary organizations or community council services.

As already mentioned, Avon Community Council after its inception in the seventies, had for the first three years to devote its energies to promoting the establishment of Avon voluntary associations. Even to this day, the membership of the Avon RCC is dominated by Parish Council and Village Hall groups and there is an absence of the spread of voluntary groups that exists in Cornwall, which includes the Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital, the Young Diabetic Group, the NSPCC, the Nature Conservancy Council, the WRVS, the Association for the Deaf, and many more.

Expanding the voluntary sector and, hence, its own membership is not a current function or need of the Cornwall RCC as it is

for Avon, although it is unlikely that there will continue to be very much expansion of the number of voluntary associations in Avon and therefore there is little done at present by the Community Council to achieve this, especially where the time for it can hardly be justified.

Linked to this, however, is the task of making the community council's function more widely known and Staffordshire's Director, Simon Smith, ranks this is his uppermost function when he took over as Secretary (as it was then called) in 1980 and while there were many voluntary organizations in rural Staffordshire at the time, relatively few were aware of the RCCs existence nor put very much store by it. What the Community Councils had to do, says Simon, was to make themselves more widely known and, more importantly, offer voluntary groups as well as rural communities something worthwhile.

(iii) Publications

One of the most important developments for each of the four RCCs in the study over the past three years has been the creation of Community Council magazines which appear quarterly. This has been facilitated by technological improvements in the printing arena which now allow organizations such as the RCCs to put out news magazines which have a highly professional appearance while costing little more than the old 'roneoed' newsletters which did little to enhance any professional image that RCCs may have been trying to put across. Community Council Newsletters seem to have, more than anything else, made membership of the community council

worthwhile in local terms for rural organizations and through it they are able to publicise their activities and promote support for their work.

(iv) Services to Members

'Membership' appears to fall into different categories in the RCCs and there are different levels of service offered, although the dividing lines are not altogether clear and nor can they be. Any organization (particularly voluntary) or individual is entitled to come in off the street or phone the RCC for advice or assistance in its function of providing a voluntary service. Associations or organizations that are likely to need the service that is offered by the RCC are, however, expected to contribute to its maintenance through membership although there is no fixed fee for this: it is agreed between the RCC and the association concerned. Furthermore, the benefits are not regarded as being merely one way and the directors of the RCC emphasise the importance of their representing the widest possible cross section of the voluntary sector, which is the indicator of these base of support.

For member organizations, the major benefits are numerous. Particularly now as the major sources of funding for voluntary organizations are the government departments and QUANGOS, such as the Development Commission, and the NCVO is the central channelling agency of these governmental bodies, membership of the NCVO has become increasingly important for voluntary organizations. And in rural areas, membership of the Rural Community Councils may be the most accessible route to NCVO and

government funds. Many voluntary bodies, such as the Red Cross, may have their own national bodies and this is an alternative way to national funds, but such national bodies may be either remote or small operations, such as the National Association of Local Councils. For some, however, such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux, the national structure and network is sufficiently powerful for them not to be too bothered by a need to be members of the rural community councils. Some of them are members out of voluntary solidarity. For smaller organizations or local groups, however, the RCC is the body which will have the knowledge of the availability of grants and funds and, in many cases, assesses prospective candidates for government and voluntary funding.

(v) Agency Services

At a more contractual level, Rural Community Councils also offer an agency service to member organizations. This is also discretionary although, as has been mentioned, there is now considerably more pressure being exerted both on (particularly from the Development Commission) and by the RCCs for the costs of staff time as well as other costs to be covered by the fee. The imbalance allowed takes into account the importance of the association to the rural communities and now the RCCs are beginning to say "no" to agency services hitherto offered to organizations whose work is not considered vital. Such refusal of service in itself is difficult because it is counter to traditional voluntary ethos.

Within this service, RCCs offer secretarial support work, which might include the taking of minutes for meetings and their follow-up distribution (for example in the case of the county associations of Parish Councils, which includes the use of Community House), the typing and printing of publications and pamphlets (for example, the county historical associations), the provision of newsletters and information sheets which are separate to the magazine as, for instance, the 'Village Halls Forum' newsletter at Avon which is written and produced by John Butler. In addition to secretarial support, the RCC might also be the central informational and advisory centre at county level for particular voluntary organizations, such as the Parish Councils and the Village Halls.

At a national level, for instance, the parish council body - the National Association of Local Councils - consists only of a Chairman and one clerk and are therefore unable to deal with day to day advice from (approximately) one thousand five hundred parish councils in England. At county level there is no alternative body to the rural community council although there is a county association of local councils, but this too has very limited resources and is a purely voluntary body with representatives from local parish councils. The RCC is the only available resource for parish councils and is recognised as the source of expertise in each county. In Avon, for example, the Avon Association of Local Councils pays the RCC an annual (at present) fee of £3,500 in return for which it acts as the secretariat for the county association, is available to advise local councils on the complexities of legalities, rights, obligations, limits of power and procedures and, in most counties, the RCC provides training days for voluntary parish council clerks.

One of the misconceptions that the RCCs have to deal with is the belief, within the parish councils, that the rural community councils are the county parish council body and that dealing with parish councils is their sole function.

The director at Avon, Anne Parsons, who takes responsibility for the parish council work herself, estimates that she would devote two full days of each week to this aspect of the RCC work and also estimates that the agency fee paid by the association would cover 'about 45% of the real costs to the council'. In its turn, the Development Commission now feels that it is funding many of the parish councils which, they feel, is an inappropriate use of their funds which should be met by the County Councils.

(vi) Village Halls

Village Hall work could be described as the most traditional of all the RCC voluntary functions, providing the pioneer community councils with an important link with both county councils, particularly education departments involved in the establishment of adult education schemes, and with central government which used the NCSS and, in turn, the RCCs to manage the funding of village hall building schemes.

Today, village halls are generally the focus for most voluntary associations in rural villages including drama and music societies, youth clubs, the Red Cross and the Women's Institutes. The Rural Community Councils may provide individual services to each of the affiliated associations but, in addition, provide advice and

information to voluntary management groups concerning the restrictions of use, the availability of grants, issues of insurance and other legal matters to do with, for example, finance and liquor licences.

While RCCs today are dealing with fewer applications for new village halls, the new issue is now the repair of the old ones and the RCCs are the focus of the demands and needs and handle the prioritising of applications to the possible sources of grants, primarily the Development Commission and the County Councils.

The difficulties involved in this for individual RCCs varies. As mentioned already, in Avon the County Council has withdrawn all grant-aid to village hall projects and in place of this the RCC has had to turn to the MSC Community Building Programme in order that village halls receive urgent repair work and, for the RCC, this is both more complicated and demands more staff time.

The withdrawal of other services in many rural areas, such as transport, health and education, have also increased the demands made on village halls to provide voluntary replacement services. Many village halls are now being used as temporary post-offices and doctor's surgeries and this has involved some interesting political tautologies. The Development Commission, connected to Whitehall through the Department of the Environment, has instigated a new grant scheme (through the RCCs) to Village Halls who are offering new services, such as doctor's surgeries, post offices, transport schemes, though which are run on a voluntary basis. This expansion of the use of village halls, however, has contravened some aspects of the rules regarding their use, which has required the RCCs, in their turn, and through the Standing Conference of the Rural

Community Councils to write a formal application to the Department of the Environment permitting a change in this function.

The amount of time that RCCs devote to Village Hall work appears to vary and also seems to depend on which member of staff takes on this as a duty. Additionally, the demands on the RCC depend on the stage of development of the village halls and their associations as well as the type of role within them that the RCC defines for itself. At Avon, for example, John Butler's time is devoted almost entirely to Village Hall work, but this appears to relate to various factors within the dynamics of the Avon Community Council. In Cornwall, on the other hand, the Village Hall work is done by the Countryside Officer and is additional to other aspects of his work, particularly the development work, which does not meet entirely with the approval of the Development Commission, it seems, because the DC sees itself as paying the Countryside Officer's salary.

Rural Voice

Perhaps the most important 'expansion' of the RCC agency role in recent years has been in the provision of a secretariat to Rural Voice, the body established in 1980, an alliance of organizations representing rural communities: the National Women's Institutes, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the National Association of Local Councils, the National Farmers' Union, the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers, the NCVO and the Standing Conference of Rural Community Councils. At national level the Rural Department head, David White, is secretary to Rural Voice.

I have placed Rural Voice under neither voluntary or development work because it is not seen as RCC work as such. Strictly speaking, the RCC role is purely a secretarial agency service offered to Rural Voice members, although in practice (or reality) its function is more than that.

In most counties, the national model for Rural Voice is replicated with the RCC providing a secretariat: three of the four RCCs in the study have established a Rural Voice, while the fourth, Staffordshire, have decided to do so this year. Membership at county level is not entirely bound by the national model and to some extent depends on the strength of the local body. In Cornwall, for example, the Rural Voice is made up of an alliance of the RCC, the Women's Institutes, the Playing Fields Association (one of the few counties where there is still a viable PFA, it would seem), the Country Landowners, the National Farmers' Union, the Farmworkers' Union, the CPRE and the Young Farmers.

Development Work

The dividing line between what may be described as voluntary/ traditional or developmental is somewhat arbitrary and the distinction is one which is useful in clarifying the areas of RCC function rather than reflecting the realities of different types of work.

The emphasis on developmental work coincided, to some extent, with the arrival of the countryside officers in the early seventies who saw themselves as professionals rather than as part of the voluntary sector and also with the increased reliance on the

Development Commission, which has clearly changed its own function over the period of the seventies from being purely a source of funding to having an active role in the development of the countryside. In association with this the Rural Department at the NCVO has also realigned its own function which it sees also as being actively involved in the development of the countryside and the voluntary organisations which service that, rather than merely as a resource for voluntary bodies whose independence gives them the right to do whatever they like. While the Rural Department or the DC have limitations on their authority with respect to RCCs, they do have power and this is exercised to influence RCC policy and practice.

(i) Development Commission Projects

One distinct area of development work that the RCCs are involved in is their "agency" function in relation to Development Commission projects. Through the RCCs, the DC sponsors several projects, some exclusively through the RCC, others in conjunction with other bodies, such as CoSIRA.

At the most fundamental level, the DC finances all the RCCs with (approximately) £30,000 per year (the current level) which includes the salaries of the Director (or Chief Officer), the Countryside (or Field) Officer and a general grant for the development work. There has been considerable conflict between RCCs and the DC over the proportion of the work done by RCCs which is felt to be devoted to development work as against the support of voluntary organizations which are not seen (by the DC) to be contributing to what it regards as rural development.

A second type of funding that comes from the DC is through the *Rural Initiatives Fund.* This money is not tied to any particular project but appears rather to act as a carrot to RCCs to increase their income from voluntary sources and hence to decrease the demands that are made on the DC itself.

Thirdly, the DC sponsors various kinds of projects and provides grant aiding for specific work for which local groups, either voluntary or otherwise, can apply through the RCCs. With respect to these, the RCC itself acts as a shortlisting/selection body, sifting out appropriate applications for grant aiding before the DC itself makes a final decision in relation to its own priorities and demands on available grants. In many such situations, the RCC with then act *in loco parentis* to see that once a grant is made, that such granting is used appropriately and to provide the necessary support.

The most central of the DC projects comes under the heading of *Special Investment Areas* which provide the focus for the DC's active and most direct role in the countryside. Under the SIA scheme, the central government (through the DC) each year decides which areas of rural England warrant the areas of greatest need and, therefore, the greatest influx of government funding. Even here, however, the amount of direct management by the DC and the amount that is delegated to other bodies, such as the RCCs or CoSIRA, varies.

One of the most major projects undertaken by the Development Commission in the last four years has been the Moors Community Development Project, a development project focussing on rural industries, conservation (such as repair work to canals and locks)

and employment initiatives in, what is described by Simon Smith as,"the most deprived area of Staffordshire and England". This was designated as a priority area in 1981 by the DC which provided major funding for a three year period with additional funding coming from the Ernest Cook Trust.

The DC itself appointed a full-time project officer for the period of the project and one of the central RCC functions in this is to provide local support, management and consultative service to this project officer, a service for which the RCC, acting as the DC's agent in Staffordshire, receives additional finance. The DC itself, however, has considerable direct contact with this project and its own representatives from London meet with the project officer and also the RCC director sometimes monthly. Inevitably, therefore, the DC has greater direct contact with the RCC over other aspects of its work and the RCC enjoys what it considers to be a supportive and co-operative relationship with the DC. A corollary of this is that other RCCs (Avon, for example) do not feel that they have the same interest shown in their work by the DC and, to some extent, it is true to say they don't.

There appear to be, however, inconsistencies in the DC's handling and management of SIA projects which does cause feelings which are aligned to the support that is felt in Staffordshire. As figures show, almost the entire rural area of Cornwall is designated at present as a Special Investment Area by the Ministry but the management of projects there has caused considerable animosity and misunderstanding between the DC and the RCC.

In 1983 the Cornwall RCC gained initial approval for its Three Villages Project, a scheme supported by local industries for the conversion of derelict barns into workshops for small industries in three northern Cornish villages. With the preparatory work completed by the RCC with backing from the DC representation, the final submission was frozen for four months and then rejected by the Development Commission on the grounds that it "wasn't sufficiently commercially viable." One consequence of this was that the RCC itself lost face with (and the faith of) local bodies who had provided considerable support on the understanding that it was going ahead.

Two factors appear to emerge as central to the failure of the Three Villages Project as a SIA project with the RCC and the DC working together. Firstly, there is the influence of DC/central government structure itself: the individual contact in the DC was of insufficient experience and seniority to recognise what would or wouldn't be given a final approval for funding and therefore the RCC (and the local Cornish groups involved) fell victim to a degree of incompetence or inefficiency or lack of communication within the DC. Secondly, a vital difference between the Cornish and Staffordshire projects was that the latter appears to have been regarded as a DC initiative and project they "owned" it and this ownership issue is important.

The Manpower Services Commission

Since its inception but moreover since its central function in the current government's employment initiatives, the MSC has

played an important part in many aspects of RCC development work. This is related both to the development (and continued functioning of) the RCCs themselves, as well as to their role in tackling the issue of employment in rural areas.

As with its role in other areas, the MSC's relationship with the RCCs has been both complex and controversial and I shall not try to tackle those complexities here. Many RCCs have avoided formal collaboration with the MSC, partly because of the complexity and controversy but also because the return for the RCC is minute compared to the relative output. For some of the more financially volnerable RCCs, however, the need for survival has left executive committees and directors with what they see as no choice but to carry out projects under the MSC umbrella.

The MSC provides funding for three different kinds of projects in which the RCCs have become involved in three possible ways: the sponsorship/management of projects within rural areas (i.e. with the RCC acting as the agent of the MSC in the absence of a county MSC body); the employment of temporary staff for their own work, the funding for which is provided by the MSC; thirdly, the RCC acts as an informational resource centre for rural organizations or individuals with respect to the availability and qualifications of such bodies/persons for MSC funding.

The three MSC projects in operation are: *the Community Programme*, which provides temporary employment (between 13 and 52 weeks) for unemployed adults in approved schemes; the *Youth Training Scheme* (YTS) which succeeded the *Youth Opportunity Programme* (YOP) which provides training for youths aged 16-18; and the *Voluntary Projects*

Programme which is aimed at the development of voluntary health and care projects for which MSC funding provides management sponsorships. Within this the RCC might provide such management itself or act as the intermediary between the MSC and a body (or person) outside the RCC.

Avon Community Council is currently managing two schemes under MSC funding which it is forced to do, says its Director, in the absence of additional funding for special projects (such as SIA projects) coming from the Development Commission. It is running a Community Programme which, among other things, is providing for repairs to village halls, grants for which have ceased to be provided by the county council. It has also established a YTS project in Bristol and is managing this on behalf of the MSC.

Leicestershire RCC is also operating a Community Programme (and employing temporary staff under this) and a YTS scheme, while Staffordshire was operating a Community Programme but "avoiding at all costs" employing MSC staff themselves because of the problems it creates for the RCC.

One of the major problems created by MSC projects for RCCs was the friction (and other difficulties) caused by the toing and froing of government funding for MSC projects over which the RCCs have no control but are nevertheless left to manage. In Staffordshire, for example, in the latter half of 1983, the RCC, under a directive from the MSC, had lobbied local industries, in addition to setting up its own building projects for the refurbishment of village halls and other buildings to provide for 280 MSC Community Programme

placements. After these had been secured the government, in January 1984, announced cuts in MSC funding and the MSC, in its turn, reduced its funding of placements from the original 280 places to 176.

Rural Facilities and Services

The second type of work which is described as "developmental" is that related to arresting the decline of rural facilities and services. Central to this has been the conducting of surveys, the setting up of *Rural Voice* (to defuse accusations of "political involvement") and the involvement of the countryside officers in examining school closures, the loss of village post-offices and shops, the disappearance and decline of public housing projects, the loss of employment and the contraction of health facilities.

In 1977, the RCCs in the south-west of England (Gloucester, Somerset, Wiltshire, Devon, Cornwall and Avon), with the assistance of the newly reconvened Rural Department at the NCVO, conducted a survey on facilities (schools, post-offices, shops, chemists, surgeries and transport) on their respective rural areas which showed that, in the five year period from 1972, they had decreased and that trends in local government policy indicated that the rate of decline would increase.

A report on this survey, *The Decline of Rural Services* was produced by the Standing Conferences of Rural Community Councils in 1978 and in its introduction said that it felt "that the RCCs have an important contribution to make in trying to take an overall look at the wide range of closures affecting rural communities,

at the way closures take place, their effects on community life and the response they produce."

The survey in the south-west of England prompted other regions to carry out similar exercises and where this did not happen pressure from the Standing Conference and the Rural Department prompted action. The conduct of such surveys has become an integral part of RCC function.

The survey in the south-west marked, says John Butler, "a turning point in the function of our community council" and, coinciding with the re-establishment of the Rural Department, "marked a turning point in the function of RCCs generally". The action which followed the collation of survey information was to become the centre of the Rural Department's focus of what it called the "development work".

One can therefore see the potential, and in some cases real, conflict that arises from the different groups defining their central functions in different ways: where some RCCs see their central function being their "voluntary" work, there is also a difference in what the Rural Department and the Development Commission see as being the essential "development work".

Following the evidence of the surveys, the Rural Department and the RCCs have facilitated campaigns to arrest declining services by producing information booklets, briefing papers (e.g. what action school committees can take to impede proposed closure programmes) and, particularly through Rural Voice, lobbied MPs and County Councils.

The question of RCC role is a delicate one in, for example, their function in school closures. There is less problem, for instance, when the RCC is approached by an active school committee seeking advice and information. It becomes much more difficult and delicate when the RCC is asked for assistance by, for example, one or two individuals in a school committee which is basically conservative and doesn't want to rock the boat or that individuals are opposed to any action to prevent school closures because of the relationships they have with the local authority in a different capacity. If the RCC appears to be "taking a line" then it is accused of becoming "political". This is where, says Gabrielle Mullin, the Field Officer at Avon, that using a Rural Voice letterhead, as against the RCC one, is essential.

The other conflict of young countryside officers and Directors in rural areas is the one between their own personal concerns and maintaining the neutral role of the RCC. "It is difficult to pull back to being neutral when you are personally totally committed to a particular issue", says Gabrielle Mullin.

The function of the Rural Community Council, in this respect, can be illustrated by example. In Cornwall, in 1983, the county council announced the closure of seventeen village schools. Previous closure proposals, though not as severe, had gone through unopposed. The RCC in Truro produced a briefing paper (based on material collected by the Rural Department from action taken in other areas and also edited by the Legal Department at the NCVO), visited schools and spoke to parent groups about what they could do, and what had been done elsewhere, in order to save their schools. The political

pressure mounted by villages supporting each other saw, in the end, the closure of only four of the schools but without such action, says Duncan Oliver, they would have lost twelve most definitely. One side effect has been an increase in the degree of animosity between the RCC and the Education Department of the local authority.

Another important issue at present in rural areas is the provision of cheap housing. Various factors, including the rush by city professional and business people to commute from rural villages, have combined to increase demand for, and hence push the prices up, of houses in rural areas. In Cornwall, at the present time, one-third of all houses are second homes to people and families living elsewhere and mainly in the larger cities (BBC, Radio 4). The availability of such housing initially, in the seventies, was caused by increased unemployment in rural areas but has since been accompanied by severe cutting in the provision of public housing which has outstripped the demands and the need. The now lack of low-cost housing has become a contributory factor in the decline of industrial development in communities outside the big cities. Furthermore, the lack of housing available now to first-time buyers in some rural areas means an increasingly aged population.

A survey done by the Cornwall RCC in 1983 shows the decline in the provision of public housing: the figures represent new houses built, public and private:

	1966-7	1977-8	1982-3
Private	1740	1620	1284
Public	1200	800	322

(SOURCE: Cornwall RCC Newsletter, Spring 1984).

This trend is reflected nationally and the Rural Department has produced an information file for RCCs entitled "Rural Housing Initiatives" which is used in advising local action groups, such as parish councils which in turn can lobby local authorities.

Such information bulletins and surveys are available in relation to post-offices, transport facilities, surgeries and village shops and constitute a central aspect of RCC function in the 1980s.

PART FOUR: RESEARCH IN ACTION

IX. EXPECTATIONS AND INTERACTIONS

At the outset of the research, my own aims and expectations and those of the NCVO were discussed. These have been outlined in Chapter I.

The focal point of the research action was to be a working paper which was to be produced in March 1984 following two visits to each of the four RCCs, and its purpose would be to highlight the general issues raised in the visits to the RCCs, focussing particularly on those aspects of RCC life which produced others. It would contain not only material raised in discussion or observed in action (e.g. in meetings) but also some speculation on my part about likely consequences. One function therefore was to test out any such speculation.

Another purpose was to test out whether my interpretations of particular kinds of behaviour were accurate. For example, a fifty percent in the Staffordshire Executive Committee and a further fifty percent "sleeping rate" for those present was interpreted by me as an indication of exclusion of the majority because the active roles were limited to a small number who attended more than one kind of meeting. The working paper might provide a focus for exploration, space for disagreement and/or alternative explanation.

Fourthly, it would provide a vehicle for further feedback about the accuracy of my data. Any discrepancy would arise from two possibilities: either I had got it wrong or I had been given

a distorted or incomplete picture and this in itself was information that required exploration.

Because of the confidentiality agreed, there is relatively little identification in the working paper itself but the footnotes added in the thesis clarify this where possible. Even so, following my first draft, there was some unease in the Rural Department about a couple of inclusions which were changed prior to being sent to RCCs. These are also commented on in the footnotes.

Having produced the Working Paper, it was to be sent to the Rural Department for comments and discussion and then to the Directors of each of the four RCCs who would decide how to deal with it with respect to their own staff groups. The intended outcome (as was outlined at the beginning) was that I would then meet with each staff group, discuss the issues within it and, in particular, draw attention to the issues that I saw relating particularly to them, both internally and externally.

The outcome of the Working Paper did not altogether match the plan and this is discussed in Chapter XI. This in itself is important for the research but it also threw more weight onto the ongoing feedback I received from each of the interviews and meetings I attended. My detailed notes from interviews thus became much more important in themselves rather than just means to ends.

After each interview I sent a copy of my interview notes to the person concerned or, in the case of a committee, to the chairperson for additional comments. Only the two people interviewed at the Development Commission failed in the end to provide detailed feedback.

In this chapter I discuss the research interactions themselves, including expectations, and in Chapter XI I consider the feedback to the Working Paper.

The NCVO

The NCVO's central concern at the outset was to find a way whereby Directors and staffs of RCCs would have some consultative help, either directly through the project or as an outcome of it. Certainly in my first meeting at the NCVO (with Graham West and Martin Shaw), it seemed to me that the analysis desired had to be in terms of the problem being fairly and squarely with the RCCs. Having read the pamphlets discussing each of their roles (the NCVO, and within it the MDU and the Rural Department) it seemed an appropriate request from the RCCs that the NCVO should respond to stress signals.

The MDU, Graham West, pointed out, was acting in this instance in its "brokerage role" (which is stated in their guidelines). Furthermore, the NCVO did not act as a single body: "The Rural Department", said Graham, "is a separate organization (to the MDU). The NCVO is not a rational but, to use an American phrase, a 'garbage can' organization." This, it was explained to me, implied that departments within the NCVO came and went as need arose and had autonomous areas of responsibility. The dependence on the NCVO of each department was minimized. RCCs were, it was pointed out, the Rural Department's area, not the NCVO's.

It raised also the question of the unstated roles of departments such as the MDU. Was it also, for example, acting as a "buffer

department" for the Organizational Development Department?

And so to the Rural Department: What was their role in supporting the RCCs?

The Rural Department, Martin Shaw explained, had no responsibility or obligation as such to support or provide training for RCCs as they were independent: training was a matter for each individual RCC management. My suggestion at this initial meeting, that the question of stress appeared to be a multi-organizational problem brought considerable defence: the solution in the end must point towards "self-help", not look to the NCVO for additional resources.

David White reiterated this view although in a slightly different way. The reality was that the Rural Department had a limited number of resources which, at present, were stretched to their maximum capacity and these resources revolved around the expertise in rural issues and not in group and management development. There was not the experience in the staff and nor was it possible, he pointed out, to attract more experienced (i.e. experienced in management issues) staff at the salaries offered.

This did, however, leave the question of therefore co-ordinating with resources elsewhere in the NCVO.

Understandably, at first, I think both David White and Martin Shaw eyed me rather suspicously, unsure of what they were dealing with. I had come with no recommendations and while I was doing a job for nothing (financially), they wouldn't know how well it might be done. Furthermore, as Martin pointed out prior to the

first contact with the RCCs themselves, these sorts of projects had started before and the NCVO had been left high and dry - to the irritation of voluntary bodies - when they were left uncompleted.

This ambivalence was expressed towards me initially in more indirect ways, particularly by Martin who seemed very defensive about the project while expressing some outward enthusiasm. Documents that were promised me failed to arrive, phone calls weren't made. Gradually, however, this position changed as the project progressed.

What I interpreted as ambivalence about me was related also to other factors. Firstly, there was concern that my needs prevail and that on balance there would be yet another demand on limited resources. David White divulged this to me at a later meeting in saying that for the most part, management projects had meant more management for them.

In relation to Martin Shaw, there were other possible explanations for ambivalence. He was in a particularly difficult situation, being the main link between the NCVO and the rural community councils. His predecessor, Ray Strong, had been a very experienced worker in the RCCs, spent a lot of time supporting RCCs and enjoyed working in the councils themselves, sometimes covering for absent staff. And when he decided to leave, his absence was missed. All of the RCCs I visited mentioned his absence and particularly his input into management development. His was a large pair of shoes to fill and any successor was not going to be accepted easily. Any reason for rejection then was to some extent seized upon and, despite his obvious skills, Martin was regarded as "too young", he'd worked in the Surrey RCC and this

"wasn't really rural", and he wore an ear-ring which, needless to say, was not entirely conducive to establishing a healthy respect from the farmers.

When the working paper appeared in April I met with David and Martin to discuss its content. In many ways the feedback was little which, more than anything else I think, said something about the role they saw me in. At first I felt that their not having much to say about it meant that there wasn't much to say about it. Subsequent discussion and reflection revealed different things.

Firstly, the size of it was a bit of a shock to them and they felt that it was either too large or "too heavy" as a paper for the RCCs. Geography (plus other factors) made the communication system very much a written one and both Rural Department and RCCs have to consume enormous quantities of written material each day. In order to do this effectively, one must have an efficient filtering and editing skill. One of the Rural Department's functions is to act as such in the role as filter and editor. Nevertheless, the paper was about the issues that were important.

David White was reticent about its going out to the RCCs in its present form because, he felt, that it "may not get read", although some underlying reasons for this were to do with aspects of its content.

I felt also to some degree that it was something that they (the Rural Department) didn't want particularly to have to deal with. The support and development issue, it had become clear, was something that they had come to feel - and be made to feel -

uncomfortable about but their task, as defined by their interests and skills, was to do with the "rural issues". To an extent, I was freeing them from either having to think about management issues or else I was a placebo for the RCCs: something was apparently happening in the staff and development area, now we can, for the time being, get on with our job, was part of the reaction it seemed. Management development was not a responsibility of theirs, although management, it seemed, was.

The paper in itself was not particularly profound in that there was not going to be lot in it that provided marvellously new insights. This brings me back to the underlying expectation.

On two or three occasions David White said to me in a fairly casual way, something like "you know that the RCCs are expecting you to provide the answers to all their problems". I pointed out that I didn't see my role as delivering a package which provided the right solution but it was really in facilitating their own need to look at some of the organizational dynamics in a different way, a facilitation that might help the RCCs and the NCVO to come up with their own solutions.

My approach could stand or fall on one assumption and that was whether or not the NCVO and the RCCs did indeed want to think at all about the interpersonal, role and group dynamic aspects of their tasks or whether I was there merely to make them feel they were doing something about an issue that they didn't want to think about. What had been needed to re-establish the work of the Rural Department and the RCCs as relevant organizations was the employment of people who were interested, if not engrossed,

in the plight of rural communities and the issues these faced, not the issues of the groups that might do something about that. There were, however, issues in the content which were causing concern and once we had been able to discuss these through, some of the other reticence receded.

There were two main areas of "concern" about the working paper. Firstly, there was an unease about the part that I had written about the familial aspects of RCC dynamics which I had illustrated in some detail with respect to Leicestershire RCC. The question raised, about any sort of transference in working relationships, had caused discomfort it seemed while, at the same time, their objection to the personal illustration was to some extent justified. I rewrote that in a more generalized form.

The second major area was a point of fact that in itself provided an interesting bit of information in the research. It was pointed out to me that the section on Principal Assistants (which was rewritten under Deputies and Assistant Staff) was a rather odd heading given that there was only one Principal Assistant left in the country. The story then unfolded, with the added comment "... but you must have heard this", (I hadn't) that in Avon Community Council when the previous Director left four years ago, a new director, Ann Parsons, was appointed from outside the RCC over the Principal Assistant John Butler who was one of the applicants for the job. When the news came that he had not been appointed he had, "following a heavy session in the pub, phoned up various members of the Executive Committee and had become angry and abusive". (I come back to this later.)

Following the clearing of content issues, it was then agreed that this paper should go to the RCCs within the study but, additionally, it would be valuable if I could produce a much shorter paper, summarizing the main issues I had raised in the working paper. The Rural Department, the Development Commission and the SCRCC were commencing a "review" of RCCs in October and it was agreed that I would produce a document of (say) 5,000 words for that.

The Development Commission

In February I met with Margaret Black and Nigel Bland at the Development Commission. Originally, I had arranged to meet with Margaret and I was somewhat surprised to see them both together.

It was explained to me that it might be useful if Nigel was there because he dealt with two of the RCCs in the study and, indeed, this was very useful. Nevertheless, I was left with a very strong feeling that this was not the only reason for his presence and that a degree of "reinforcement" was present due, possibly, to an initial suspicion about my aims, or rather, the aims of the Rural Department.

The Development Commission saw the project (quite rightly) as having been instigated by the NCVO and there is clearly a degree of conflict and rivalry between them over issues of responsibility, ownership and policy.

Changes in policy and responsibility dating from the seventies (and discussed in Chapters VII and VIII) had compounded the issues

of authority and ownership and had increased the rivalry and distrust between them. This was an observation made from within the RCCs - the perceived split - and was also evident from my own contact.

Subsequent to this particular meeting, I attended a meeting of the Standing Conference of RCCs at the NCVO headquarters. It was the first such meeting to include representation from the Development Commission, a move which was an acknowledgement of "their need to work closer together" (and counter to an uncomfortably split working relationship). At the SCRCC meeting I sat next to Margaret Black and her degree of tension was quite in contrast to our previous meeting. She was extremely defensive as if anticipating attack. One of the items on the agenda was the proposed review of RCCs which the DC and Rural Department were going to conduct together. The Rural Department proposed that it should commence in October at the latest, being a priority issue for all parties. Margaret agreed that it was a priority but added that "due to other commitments" the Development Commission would not be able to give it attention until January. It was hastily concluded that the Rural Department would therefore begin it on its own which, I thought, would undermine its effectiveness (as now any resolution of RCC function needed DC/NCVO cooperation) and, secondly, that this was more than anything else an expression of their difficulty in tackling issues of rivalry and authority. It left also, as pointed out by Margaret Black in our previous interview, the RCCs in the position of being able to play one off against the other and yet, even with this insight, each was unable to recognise the significance of such a resolution.

Margaret Black was the only person in the project not to reply to my having sent notes of my interview. She mentioned at the SCRCC meeting that she had been quite taken aback at seeing what she'd said, written in black and white. Nevertheless, she would reply to me within the next week and, despite a further reminder, this did not happen. The quality of her comment (at this meeting) was not one of dismissal but rather one of defensiveness and this remained for me the overriding feeling about her non-response. It was also evident - and in the original interview - that developments within the Development Commission itself were creating stress.

It had been agreed at the outset of the project that the working paper would not be sent to the Development Commission prior to approval by the RCCs concerned and while this was agreed as appropriate (also by the DC) it nevertheless undoubtedly felt to them that there was an element of exclusion and possibly collusion between RCCs and the Rural Department. Margaret Black's non-response therefore was possibly also an expression of the feeling that it wasn't for them anyway.

The Rural Community Councils

On my first visit to Avon Community Council, I spent the morning in the executive meeting and then, following discussions in an informal way with members of the committee, I had lunch and the afternoon with the Director, Ann Parsons.

During the course of our initial discussion she was constantly assuring me that she had "a wonderful staff which got along extremely

well together". I became aware that this reassurance was telling me that there were things that definitely weren't alright, was a reassurance of herself or a defence against very uncomfortable issues.

On my second visit I met with the Chairman, a minister in the Church and his active function is to work within the voluntary sector. He was, therefore, to an extent also a professional within the voluntary sector and very involved actively with the work of the RCC.

We had arranged to meet immediately after a Countryside Committee meeting which we had both attended and I think that, at that stage, his expectations of me was of a fairly benign interest. He offered me a chair in the room where the meeting had just been held and there were still people walking in and out. "Now", he said after we'd exchanged a few lighthearted comments, "What would you like to know about?"

"Well" I replied, "One thing that I'm really interested in is where the limits of the Chairman's role start and finish in relation to that of the Director".

The colour drained from his cheeks slightly and a seriousness descended. Looking around he said: "...I... er... think that we'd better find somewhere more private".

I sensed from this an immediate change in his expectations and one that was, in the end, welcomed by him. One of his concerns was to provide a forum within the staff whereby they could work a few things through ("tell a few life stories", was the way the Director had described the Chairman's views of what was needed).

Interestingly, within this council, each of the people replied almost immediately after I'd sent them my interview notes and the Chairman's request was that they read each other's (he and the Director). I said that that was up to them. (I don't think this happened.)

The Countryside Officer Gabrielle Mullin initially obviously found my presence another duty to perform after a harassing morning, but then spent three hours with me which was ended by her having to pick up her car. Here the initial expectations was one of "prying" into areas that were clearly uncomfortable concerning her relationship with the Director and she wanted to discuss this more and more. Here was quite obviously a need for a space to work through or reflect on, the working relationship.

By the end of this second visit, I had become aware through various discrepancies that I was getting different stories and not the whole one. In the end, it had to come back to the Director who was acting as a gatekeeper and presenting me with a rather rosier than reality picture, either consciously or unconsciously albeit quite understandably. It was only later that a comment by the Director, which seemed out of place, about the way that reports were written and presented to the outside world was understood by me as relating to my presence there: "a professional standard was important and I don't think we should air our dirty washing in public by sending shoddy minutes". At the time I had missed the message about the real "dirty washing" concerns.

One of the central issues here only became clear following my initial Working Paper draft to the Rural Department, which was

referred to earlier regarding the appointment of Ann Parsons and the rejection of John Butler's application. This was clearly one of the "life stories" that the Chairman wanted to discuss but it remained undiscussible within the staff itself. There were several outcomes of this which were clearly alive: John Butler was the only existing Principal Assistant whose title had not been upgraded to Deputy and while he referred to himself as "Deputy", Ann Parsons was unwilling to clarify the position because she "didn't regard him as (her) deputy" but neither was she prepared to clarify the issue with him personally.

The reluctance to clarify this issue, it seemed, was not only to do with John because there was also a clear sense of rivalry (generated on both sides) between Ann and Gabrielle Mullin who, among other things, felt trapped in her own career development. She was one of the longest serving field officers in the country and was very much concerned with the question of 'what next?' It seemed to me also that she got along much better with the Chairman than did the Director.

Ann Parsons clearly sensed this rivalry herself and also felt fragile (due to criticism) about her own leadership style. In order, therefore, to clarify the situation with John, she would therefore also have to clarify the position with Gabrielle and this she seemed equally unwilling to do.

John's anger about the appointment, and probably also about the ongoing punishment of him for his reactive behaviour, had never been worked through and four years later the episode was clearly alive to the detriment of the entire working group. His anger

was continuing to be expressed, it seemed, in refusing to expand his role or even review it and the punishment continued through his salary never having been increased nor discussed, a situation perpetuated in part by the local authority's ceasing to be responsible for paying his salary direct but leaving it to the community council to have a discretionary salary taken from the general grant they gave to the RCC. In a different general employment climate John, as he said, would have left the RCC "at least two years ago" and, he said, he felt in any case very dispensable. The stress on him personally in this situation (even if he did have a part to play in its development) was immense and the defenses he'd drawn around himself (including closed role boundaries) were not merely angry but also protective.

It felt to me that at Avon the Director's expectation of me was that I would offer a solution to the underlying discord but in a way that would avoid their having to confront the issues themselves nor air the dirty washing.

A constant issue within this council was money. It is clearly a real issue and they are one of the (if not the) poorest RCCs in the country, with the County Council (Labour) each pruning back on this level of support, which was the source of the Principal Assistant's salary. Nor had they the advantage of having accumulated capital from more prosperous times for the voluntary sector, as the Avon RCC had only been created in the early seventies and therefore was born into an austere climate. Furthermore, it had come into existence through the creation of new counties in the early seventies and traditional folk were antagonistic towards their new county identity.

The issue of resources - and particularly of finance - appeared here to transcend prudence and reached a level of panic which created an almost hysterical atmosphere around the subjects of money and sacrifice. When, for example, I asked if I could have a copy of some Parish Council regulations - six pages - I was subsequently charged 60p for the photocopy. Yet on the same day I was asked if I might be able to add an extra visit.

On the same visit I had lunch with the Director and the Principal Assistant at a local pub. When I offered to buy drinks it was quickly pointed out to me that we would each pay for our own and this was subsequently worked out to the last penny which included Ann's changing a £ note at the bar in order to give me 2p change which, she said, was owing.

This episode stood in sharp contrast to Cornwall RCC where I went to the Young Farmers Club with the Director and staff and the Director announced that this was an occasion where it was "entirely appropriate for the RCC to pay for all our lunches". Clearly, there was more affluence here (though not evident in comparing annual accounts), but there was a different attitude also that appeared to have powerful manifestations in the staff dynamic. The issue felt to be in the area of the role of nourishment (mothering?) and its importance to the group particularly when under stress.

Perhaps it could also be turned around the other way as clearly, at least at the time of my visit, Avon was more stressed than Cornwall: what was the effect of group stress - and, therefore

need for nourishment - on the group leader, particularly if that leader is a woman? The demand to be fed, or to have anxiety removed, is a very threatening one and therefore perhaps, under real stress the response (and need) of the leader may be to starve the group.

To take this one step further, is the unconscious feeling behind starving the hungry babies one of killing them off (or being killed) and therefore the cyclic unconscious fantasy within the group is about infanticide? This is an interpretation along the lines pursued by Dorothy Bloch (1979).

Despite the hospitality and generosity at Cornwall, being included at all was a more difficult task. For a start, this was the one council that had not been included in David's original shortlist and therefore, I presume, had not requested any assistance from the Rural Department.

When I had forwarded my original plan to the RCCs, Cornwall had made it clear that while willing to participate, they alone were not particularly interested in any feedback: no request had come from them and so they regarded the exercise much more as a favour by them rather than for them. There was certainly a strong air of self-sufficiency which was not only to do with a competent and harmonious working group but also, I felt, an expression of general Cornish self-sufficiency and independence from things run from London (or England).

The boundary therefore was harder to breach and unlike the other RCCs with whom I was able to make immediate appointments

which were made to fit my own schedule, my first suggestion for a visit was "inconvenient". The outcome of these various negotiations resulted in my having no visit to Cornwall until having had two visits to each of the others. As it turned out, this had particular advantages as I was, by the time I went there, quite clear about the areas I wanted to explore.

The curiosity which was uppermost on my first day in Cornwall was why they had been chosen. There was certainly considerable suspicion about 'spying' but when I explained that it fitted with staying with friends (whom the Director knew), the door was open.

One of the most noticeable factors of Staffordshire RCC was the relative openness of the Director Simon Smith, which was in marked contrast to the tight outer boundary control in Cornwall and the inner divisions of Avon. At my first meeting in Stafford, Simon at the outset had wanted to include his field officer Norman Towner and it was only at my insistence that subsequently I met them individually. They then compared interview notes, which occurred also at Cornwall, while at Avon the insistence on confidentiality was an overriding concern within the group.

Even so, the situation at Stafford highlighted the noticeable difference in atmosphere between a working pair as against the three central staff that existed in the other three community councils.

In relation to me there was an openness and welcoming for support, particularly at a time when they were on the brink of further change: Simon was leaving Stafford to take over the community

council in Gloucester, closer to his family and roots. Norman himself was not seeking the director's position, but welcomed a space to talk through some of the anxieties related to Simon's successor while touching on (what I felt to be) issues of having started the descent from the top of his professional career towards retirement, with considerable disappointment (it had at one time approached breakdown) behind him.

At Leicestershire the Director Brian Taylor had been in post for two and a half years. The previous Director had died in post in 1981 and for eleven months while the post remained vacant, the deputy Meg Shotton had deputised. She was also an applicant for the permanent position but was told in the interview (by the Development Commission) that she would not be appointed as she was due for retirement (under new NCVO/DC policy that Directors would retire at 60) in March 1985.

There were several issues here. Firstly, Leicestershire RCC under its previous Director and also Chairman (supported by a very large executive committee) were very much supporters of the "old style" RCCs who saw their primary function as voluntary bodies dedicated to the traditional work, entitled to financial support from public funds but insisting to the letter on autonomy and independence of action. Demands made on them by either the Development Commission, for a greater accountability in the area of development work, and by the Rural Department for more professionalism were met with firm resistance.

Brian Taylor describes many RCCs, prior to reform as "an amateurish conglomeration of bits and pieces, which were content

to be obscure, small in horizons and happy to pursue irrelevant things".

Meg Shotton came to work with the community council in 1966 with an interest centred on voluntary work. Within the community council she still very much carries the mantle of the old RCCs although she admits that some of the changes have been for the better. She resists, however, a firm acknowledgement that either the Development Commission or the Rural Department really know what's good for the countryside.

Brian saw his role in taking on the RCC as twofold: firstly, to focus its attention on what he calls "the relevant issues", and in this he had a similar view to David White. He also has a similar planning background and it was David White who prompted him to apply for the director's job after Meg Shotton's application had been vetoed. Secondly, he is very concerned with what he calls "the management issues" - i.e. to structure the organization with committees and individuals who were clear about their tasks, functions and roles in relation to the overall aims of the organization.

There were several phases in this development. Firstly, as director, Brian prompted a review of the RCC constitution and policy, the outcomes of which were not at first anticipated by the Chairman who sanctioned the creation of a sub-committee to steer this through. Once this had been created and its significance recognised, "a terrific split" emerged between what Brian calls "the progressives and the conservatives". After a long struggle

and with strong support and pressure from the NCVO and the DC the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Treasurer stood down and the committee re-elected. They were replaced by individuals who were acceptable to both longer-standing and newer members of the committee although many people left either out of choice or through non-reappointment.

The first phase was complete by the middle of 1983. The second, Brian said, would wait until Meg retired in 1985. They now had a reasonably harmonious group and it was important not to confront for the time being.

In my meetings with them, however, these issues were clearly still alive but the potential split between Brian and Meg was somewhat distracted by a mutual disaffection with the Countryside Officer (who was absent on both occasions I visited) who, both felt, showed little interest or initiative for the job. (He resigned - with "help" - several months later).

Meg claimed to have "gotten over" the disappointment of her non-appointment and she was able to support Brian while she saw herself as having a "maternal role" in the community council. She was, however, finding it difficult to face her retirement ("the community council is my whole life") and this indeed was to precipitate the next crisis.

X. A WORKING PAPER: THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCILS AND THE ISSUE OF STRESS

A. Introduction

B. Reactive and Proactive Organizational Change

C. Membership: The Full Council.

D. Committees: Executive and Other

E. Delineation of Chairman and Director Roles

F. The Staff Group.

G. The Chief Salaried Officer (Director).

H. The Field (Countryside) Officer.

I. Deputies and Assistants

J. Secretarial Staff.

For notes relating to the Working Paper,
see Appendix 1.

This paper was distributed to the Rural Department of the NCVO and the four RCCs in the study in May-June, 1984.

A. INTRODUCTION

The comments made in this paper I have tried to keep on a general level: not all comments are relevant to each of the community councils. Nevertheless, in the first instance, this paper will be available to the Rural Department and the staffs of the four community councils.

This working paper is based on my discussions with people in the RCC network, as well as my own observations and, to an extent, interpretations of meetings and reports. The interpretative aspect is another aspect of a working paper that may not be appropriate to a different sort of report. The implication here is that it is a space providing for discussion and possibly dispute, around which working groups can examine aspects of function, task, role as well as issues of support, training and development.

There needs to be something said at this juncture about the use of organizational literature and theory as well as written material provided by the RCCs, the Development Commission and the NCVO. These have made important contributions to what is included here, but I have not included any references nor explanations of theoretical concepts, which would expand the work of a working paper considerably, but not necessarily at this stage helpfully. Perhaps there are some difficulties created in this, particularly in my use of some of the theoretical concepts and organizational "jargon" which need expansion and explanation.

Systems Thinking and Psychoanalytic concepts of groups have played an important part in my own reading on organizational behaviour

and I use various concepts in relation to these. Later in the introduction I refer to the organizations involved and the network as open systems about which much has been written. Systems theory has had an important influence on the format of these working papers, but there is no expansion of this included here. References to organizational "energy", including energy used in the defence against anxiety, are in part concepts from systems thinking, though not unique to this. Similarly, the concepts of "group-as-a-whole" and groups as "more than the sums of their parts" are from systems and psychoanalytic group thinking.

At the outset it was agreed that in order to understand the dynamic tensions within and around Rural Community Councils, one would have to look wider than the RCCs themselves to include the relationships with other organizations. Indeed, one of the conflicts at least in the past but possibly to a lessening degree has been caused by differing views of Rural Community Councils as local, independent and voluntary while not taking into account that they are at the same time part of a wider network of interrelated organizations, with different aspects of interdependence, accountability, responsibility, authority and so on, accorded to different parts of different systems of which they form parts.

Figures I, II and III (see Figs iii, iv, and v in Chapter III) present diagrammatic representations of different views or RCC 'systems', which provide the background to this discussion paper. In each case there is an internal and an external environment, with a boundary between each. The task of management in each case then is twofold: to manage the organization with respect to its

function and task in relation to the external environment (the transactions across the boundaries of the organization) and, in addition, to maintain an internal system that can carry out the task in relation to the external environment.

Taken on its own, this paper may reinforce a view of community councils as 'closed systems' with no reference to its outside task and the environment in which it exists. This appears to have been one of the major problems with the RCCs up to the mid-seventies in which some appeared to cease to respond either to the needs of the outside environment in developing their functions to changing needs, as well as failing to change internal structures and functions in response to changes in the external environment. One of the central issues for RCCs then is the extent to which organizational changes have been reactive to changing environmental circumstances rather than proactive. The structures and functions of the internal systems have been put under enormous pressure in the 'time lag' between external and internal changes.

Figure v (Chapter III) shows the RCCs in the context of a wider task system which is involved in the maintenance and development of the socio-economic aspects of rural life in England. One of the basic conflicts between different organizational views of RCCs, which includes considerations of aspects of their independence and interdependence, is that they are seen in the context of only one of these systems. One might also consider others.

April 1984.

B. REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

A need to professionalize has stemmed from radical environmental changes over the last ten years. Resultant organizational change has involved several steps: a recognition of a changing environment, a development of function to meet changing demands, an examination of internal structures and functions in response to changing organizational needs.

The "looking inwards", the examination of internal structures and functions in relation to outside demands, has tended on the whole to be reactive rather than proactive, and in the interim (which refers also to the present time) the "old" structures and functions (including roles) are placed under enormous stress, while they catch up with changes in the environment. This process of looking inwards has begun in each of the RCCs I have visited and has been provoked by the need to rematch structures and functions to the radical expansion of the task of rural community councils. This restructuring is an exhaustive and energy using activity on its own, which taxes the resources of the RCCs which must, at the same time, continue to respond to the demands of the outside world.

Reactive examination of internal functions and structures has occurred as a result of stress indicators or the appearance of breakdown points which may relate to structural breakdowns or perhaps to individuals. While the cracks that show under pressure appear in the first instance in different places, this also relates to the differences in the amenability of different parts of the organizations to re-examination. Additionally, in the reactive examination, not all parts of the whole, it would seem, can be

looked at once. Furthermore, some of the imbalances may only be seen by looking from a different perspective. This might be facilitated in part by an outside view.

In working in an environment (which includes the NCVO and the statutory bodies) where to an extent resources concentrate on information and knowledge about rural issues, there appears to be a limited recognition of the processes at work, both for the staff groups themselves and the way they view their clients.

Nevertheless, as mentioned, each of the RCCs I have visited have begun to re-examine internal structures and with this inevitably comes a period of uncertainty and conflict as some of the older structures and functions are reassembled and changed. Demands for support in part are an expression of the concomitant anxiety that goes with radical change in any organization, which is also coupled with an excitement about the future.

C. MEMBERSHIP: THE FULL COUNCIL

While membership to the Councils is comprised of both voluntary and statutory bodies, the predominance appears generally to be the former and in some cases, until recently, solely. This appears to exacerbate the problem that in designing 'general policy', the Rural Community Councils do this on the basis of being voluntary rather than intermediary. Nevertheless, the problems that lead to this lack of clarity should not emanate from the general membership where the role may be quite rightly for individuals to represent the interests of their own organizations and, in

practice, in a very large group the Full Council may be able to achieve little more than giving members a voice. On the whole, the 'problems' referred to might appear to come from the full membership if the Executive Committee fails to see itself as nothing different than a smaller version of the membership.

For the reasons that are dealt with throughout this paper, the work of the Community Council, at least in the last ten years, has to be much more of a balance between local voluntary, national and statutory considerations which are not proportionately reflected at the membership level of the community council, which weighs heavily on the local voluntary side. It would appear an awareness of this needs to be taken on within the RCCs, as has occurred in two of the Councils I have met with (Note 1, see Appendix I). As is mentioned in relation to any roles (including committees) within the council, one of the tasks of 'management' is the induction of members into the work of the community council, which includes a knowledge of its structures, financial sources, areas of support and so must include a knowledge of the roles and relationships with the Development Commission, Local Authorities and the NCVO. While I have not attended any Full Council meetings, a lack of clarity about the roles and points of reference of committees and individuals within them has been apparent in other situations and is borne out in comments by others (Note 2).

One of the issues for the membership, and more crucially for the executive committees where it is a relevant point, is the continuation "as if" Development Commission funding is still on the basis that it was traditionally. This is a point that is borne

out in comments by David, Margaret and directors of community councils (i.e. comments about the nature of funding). As David White says:

> "The Development Commission can hand over money to the voluntary organizations as independent bodies and they in their turn can do what they like with it. Or they can say 'this is our money and it is given on condition that we have a say in what is done with it".

The latter condition is a much more definite policy now: it may not represent such a change in actual policy, but prior to the late seventies the community councils in practice were made less accountable. Margaret Black:

> "The Rural Community Councils don't get a grant merely because we think they're a good thing. We have development objectives in rural areas and we fund them as a way of achieving that objective, although that doesn't mean we're telling them what to do".

Obviously one of the issues is: "when does it mean that they're telling us what to do?" This is not an issue for here, however. It does mean, however, that community councils and the Development Commission have to look at their collaborative relationship, as is the case with the relationships with other statutory bodies.

One outcome appears to be a conflict within the RCCs themselves, where the greatest discrepancy is likely to be between the full membership, where the proportion of voluntary representation is greatest, and the staff who are paid.

Under such conditions where the members of the councils feel under assault from the outside, there are two possible reactions to addressing the dissonance and which has occurred in practice: they can become defensive against the 'outside force' (emphasize

their independence and autonomy) and reinforce the traditional interests by either increasing the voluntary membership of those sectors of it whose views concur, or close ranks against the statutory bodies (which may include the Rural Department (Note 3). The alternative is to seek a more collaborative relationship with the statutory bodies by including them more in the membership and executive committees (Note 4). These outcomes are more crucial when they are carried over into the executive committees themselves, which seems an almost inevitable outcome unless it is addressed consciously by the memberships and executives as an issue.

Within this there is a crucial issue for the Chairman and the Director in managerial terms, and that is one of "educating" committees and individual incoming members into the background relationships, work of and policies of the statutory authorities and the Rural Department.

To some extent, the conflict mentioned above is something that community councils have to work with as member representation appears to fall heavily on the side of local voluntary representation, but a shared awareness of the problem, rather than a collusion, means the difference in the degree of energy of the council used up in the 'fight' (or flight) which permeates the community council as a whole. If this problem is addressed by the full council, the imbalance can be redressed rather than exacerbated at executive level.

In my discussions, there were various issues that were raised in relation to council membership and, more particularly, in relation to their positions of office. The first of these was where there

is a predominance of a particular interest within the membership, the positions of office reflect this and therefore can add to the conflicts around 'cliques' (Note 5). This seems to be one inevitable outcome of such democratic structures. An aware council might endeavour to avoid the cliques, which appears to be happening more now than in the past primarily because such collusions resist change and have been shown to be detrimental to the development of RCCs.

In each of the councils I visited, each had in their histories (which included other councils that individuals had worked with) the painful experience of the re-election of officers who had worked hard for the councils in the past, were liked and respected, but had reached the point where they no longer had the energy to give to the needs of the post or to deal with the conflicts. Collectively, the councils could not confront this as an issue, but in avoiding this it had many repercussions for the RCC. In the long run, the outcome was more destructive for both the organization and the individual and, in the end, the quality of the retirement reflected more the tensions of the extended period than the overall career. It is a particularly difficult one for small communities and organizations to face.

D. COMMITTEES: EXECUTIVE AND OTHER

As is the case with all structures and (internal) functions of the Rural Community Councils, each community council designs its own constitution and conditions, though with some offices there are guidelines laid down by either the Rural Department or the

Development Commission. Interestingly, there appears not to be any guidelines for Executive Committee roles and responsibilities within the community councils, apart from those for the CVS organizations. While each have their own constitutions and traditions, there are generally accepted principles of function, which I take in part from the CVS guidelines (CVSNA 1982a,b; 1983).

The broad principles for executive committees, as outlined in the CVS guidelines are:

(i) to take the broad judgement of the Council, and to "analyse and refine" it;

(ii) to provide "continuity" in the organization, in the "maintenance of physical conditions, the employment of staff and the execution of policy";

(iii) to act as a body of trustees to the community council, to ensure that the RCC works within the policy laid down and to act as an assurance against any particular interest, interests or individuals taking precedence.

Until recently, it appears that many, if not most, of the executive committees developed rather as images of the full councils, smaller in size (though in some cases there appears little difference), without an eye to the difference in role and function. Of the four community councils I have worked with, three have recently (within the last two years) looked seriously to the function of the executive and have undergone radical changes. Such changes cannot be without conflict and at Leicester, for example, the collective emotional drain of two years of internal review meant there was much less left during that period to look towards the external work of the RCC.

I make here some general comments about the executive committees from my observations and discussions. I would also add that the comments that I make here are also relevant to other committees within the councils.

In recent years at least three of the councils in the study have been involved in trying to reduce the size of their executive committees, wherein they were not merely too large but also indistinguishable in function from the full council. One of the conflicts here is that membership on the executive has been one of the ways that councils have been able to have voluntary support involved in the work of the community council, with individuals having a function within the council rather than merely being a source of outside labour. In one of the RCCs, the comment was made that the revamping of the executive committee had an effect on the amount of voluntary support. Nevertheless, it seems important that this purpose of the executive committee does not get confused with the executive function.

A major issue for the executive committees, as already mentioned, is the distinction between its function and that of membership. In the latter, the principle of democratic representation of outside bodies as a means of producing a collective policy means that the role of individuals representing their own organization's interests is to an extent in keeping with its purpose. The distinction needs to be made, however, that the community council itself, however, is not merely a collective representation of local voluntary organizations and the executive is there to refine policy and redress imbalances of interests in its executive function. The

individual's role then within the executive committee is one above that of merely representing an outside body, but to look to the interests and work of the RCC as a separate organization that is different to the sum of its parts. This situation is somewhat akin to the conflicts that exist in the National Health Service 'consensus management' situation, where individuals are elected to represent their respective parts of the service, but in doing so the overall interests of the NHS as a whole are placed in jeopardy as the management group breaks down into factional or individual interests.

In freeing up their executives to fulfill a more dynamic function the RCCs I have looked at have had different responses, and it is worth underlining here that while one might talk about 'general principles' in all aspects of the community councils' work, local differences were sufficiently significant (even in county historical and cultural factors) that each RCC needs to be looked at as a separate case.

The Avon Community Council restructured its executive committee at the end of 1983 and I was fortunate to attend its first meeting under a new constitution. One of the characteristics of the new executive appears to be the inclusion of 'authority' figures, including one of the Development Commissioners (though not in role as a Commissioner), Mr Alan Leavett; a former chairman of both Avon RCC and the Standing Conference, Mr Kenneth Nealon, as well as representatives of the Local Authority and influential members of local communities.

The most noticeable characteristics of the Cornwall executive committee were (i) that there was a much higher proportion of

statutory authority members, which had arisen out of an awareness of a need to have the statutory authorities involved in the work of the council, and (ii) to coopt people onto the executive with specific professional skills, to whom work is delegated and to be done 'on behalf of the RCC'. In this way, the voluntary support was maintained within the executive body, but with a professional emphasis in terms of specific needs of the community council. Possibly a significant factor here is the high proportion of retired professional people who move to Cornwall makes this viable where, in another county, this would not be so easy. In comparison to, say, Avon, the authority within the Community Council appears to focus more directly on the director herself.

I must, however, point out that while I attended the executive committee meeting at Avon, I had little discussion about its overall function and the history of its change. At Cornwall, where my meetings were more recent, I focussed more discussion on the function of the executive, but did not attend a meeting.

Two years ago the Leicestershire RCC began a "review" which has been an exhaustive process for the community council and particularly for a new director. The aim of the director and the chairwoman now, working more closely in collaboration, is to move towards a smaller executive body which represents a wider cross-section of viewpoint.

The Staffordshire executive committee is the largest of the four RCCs that I have visited. The meeting I attended there followed after the Finance and General Purpose meeting, which was attended by a smaller number of people (twelve) and in which all were involved.

In the executive meeting there appeared to be three levels of involvement: those involved throughout the meeting, who were the core of the committee; secondly, there were those who were only occasionally involved, primarily in reference to areas in which they were personally involved (e.g. reporting back). Thirdly, there was a large number of people who were excluded or excluded themselves altogether, through being absent, which, it was pointed out to me, 'happens every time'.

The community councils that have undergone review have started this from one or both of two positions: a recognition of the need for the 'undoing' of overlarge and static bodies, and/or a review of the roles and functions in response to the question 'what should we be doing?' The second is crucial, because a change merely as a response to the first need may merely evolve into a different dose of the same sort of thing.

Certainly one of the management issues for executive committees and presumably this would fall more to the Chairman as head of that body rather than to the director, is the way that new members are introduced onto the executive, with time spent to discuss respective expectations and for the prospective member to be clear about his or her role within it, the overall reference points of the executive committee in relation to the rest of the work of the council and its parts, background issues of the committee and the RCC, and aspects of the relationships with and the work/expectations of the statutory bodies and the NCVO. What appears to happen in many instances is that committees and groups have continued on an assumption that

all its members have an understanding of these issues that arise outside of the present place and time, and that members join on the basis that they will "pick up what's going on" (Note 6).

Additionally, the Chairman needs to be clear as to the reasons why people are asked to join the executive committee, and this needs to be in conjunction with the viewpoints of others as an assurance against any individual's blindspots.

There are a number of issues here for working committees in various situations. One of these is the underlying ambivalence of existing groups about making room for "new blood". Being asked to join a committee doesn't mean being included in the real sense, and new members can feel as much outside of what's going on as they did before they attended. Absenteeism may be an issue here for the groups as a whole to examine what's happening. When terms of reference are overlooked at the outset, the outcome appears inevitably to be an increase in the 'silent majority', absenteeism, feelings of superfluousness, a lack of participation in decision making and of feeling 'excluded' (Note 7). An issue for those involved is whether or not there is a vested interest in keeping the "action" to those already involved. The other side of the coin is obviously finding able people who are prepared to give time and energy needed to do the task well.

There are also questions raised as to why individuals either want to join, or are invited to join, existing committees and where underlying motives are complex. This is possibly a question of vital importance for voluntary groups moreso than others. This

is an issue both for individuals joining and for the organizations. There are various issues that have been raised in my discussions with people in their experience of the rural community councils.

A second consideration in looking at underlying motives is to do with the fantasies about what is going on, which may have nothing to do with the actors but the spectators. For example, in more than one instance I was given examples within the 'old' committees where the numbers were swelled to 'bolster a particular interest'. In at least one example, this view was more than confirmed and clearly was a part of the political life of that committee. However, it may be that in another instance it may be more to do with a shared fantasy of a part of the group (perhaps those who feel excluded from involvement or power) and not to do with, say, the Chairman or the 'old guard'. The problem then is a different one, but either way the effect on the working collaboration of the committee or working party may be similar and therefore needs resolution. A vital issue may possibly be the one about who is or isn't prepared to discuss what might be going on within the committee.

Recruiting New Committee Members

One issue then for bringing new members onto existing committees may be to increase the lobby for a particular interest, which has been the experience of some councils (Note 8). Such 'interests' might appear to be quite benign. For example, an executive committee might possibly become the extension of an outside group: church, officers' club, or Militant Action. The obvious example for the

Rural Community Councils as a group of organizations, revolved around the general practice of recruiting retired officers in the post-war period up to the mid-seventies. While there are various considerations as to why this happened and what were the advantages of this, the uniformity of this as a general practice appears to have had marked effect on the culture of the community councils and which, in some instances, appears related to the resistance to acknowledge changing task demands in the environment. This policy is related also to other isuses, particularly the salary offered which, to an extent, appears to have dictated practice. Questions of the chicken and egg variety are thus raised: was the task of community councils in the fifties and sixties determined by the culture of the councils (as a whole), or were the limits of the task defined first and the rest follow?

Cultures can, and have, thus come to predominate some committees and may not be appropriate to the task of the (in this instance) community council executive committee. A new member may be invited to join a committee not because of his or her value to the task of the executive but, possibly unconsciously, to add to the predominate culture of the group.

A factor relevant here in the change of climate in the countryside, is the "rural versus urban" dynamic which I have found throughout (fairly understandably) but more powerful in some areas than others (Note 9). One aspect of this has been the feeling that the "truly rural" people are being taken over by either 'newcomers' (people retiring to country areas) or those "who only sleep in the countryside" (commuters). An issue, then, for executive committees

now (and community councils as wholes) is in the relationships between the 'traditional' and the 'new' rural interests.

The voluntary sector as a whole relies on source of people with time and energy on their hands, just as the voluntary sector provides an arena for those seeking an interest when time that was otherwise occupied, becomes available. While in all forms of employment, the relationship between an individual and the organization she might work for meets needs for both (the demands of a task to be done by the organization, the need of a livelihood and personal fulfillment for the individual, at the basic level), the selection process may be different in the voluntary sector. In the voluntary sector the resource of 'time available' has had a higher profile than issues of skill and task, and this in itself is an aspect of discussions in talking about the 'professionalization' of voluntary organizations. In some of the RCCs (Cornwall, for one), the emphasis has shifted to some degree onto people with 'particular skills', but this, as has been mentioned, may be a relative luxury of areas where there are high numbers of retired professional people. Other councils continue to focus on the resource of time available but are left with the issue of matching people to the task. There are two issues here: one is to do with deciding on the appropriateness of people for particular roles in the council, the other is to do with development and training . (See Appendix II).
One of the issues for committees is that incoming members are aware of a particular task that the committee is involved in and their role in that, rather than it being merely a means of 'getting together' or finding a place in a new community. It would appear that voluntary groups obviously need to keep both 'purposes' in

focus: social and task, but the latter appears to be more likely at risk. It may be, however, that as the emphasis on professionalism comes more to the fore, or within particular groups, it may be that the social aspect is threatened, which is an important consideration for maintaining voluntary support and can be lost sight of by the professionals under pressure of meeting task needs.

The social character of a committee may be the initial attraction for an individual, and it may be the fuel which maintains its functioning. A management issue is, however, keeping this in perspective with the main task of the group both as an ongoing enterprise and in relation to new people arriving. It appears to be often overlooked, not merely in relation to executive committees but to other committees.

Authority

An important issue arising from my discussions and observations of the community council committees is that of Authority. It has its relevance in relation to a number of dimensions: cultures, history, sex, age, social standing and 'expertise' or 'qualification'. It is of particular relevance also at a time of change in the rural community councils, since the mid-seventies.

I have already mentioned this in relation to Avon Community Council, but my reference to that particular council can go only so far as an illustration of there being different authority figures within the council and therefore it is a dynamic that is present. I have had too little contact to be in a position to reach conclusions

as to how far the potential 'stress' factors may weigh up against the advantages. Discussions within all four community councils, however, illustrate the relevance of this as a general issue.

The references to the 'retired officer' culture of the sixties and seventies is a case in point. Where the community councils became an extension of that, the authority of one has been projected onto the RCC arena and officer rank has carried its own authority into the community councils. This appears today to be a relevant factor, and as the pressure on the community councils has been to supercede one type of authority with another, officer rank with professional qualification in rural studies, there has been a conflict between the two. This is not to say that the holders of either rank or degree are the main protagonists, for authority is not merely a question of who holds it, but also who invests in it. This can be quite difficult for the person who is placed in a position of authority, particularly if this is not directly related to the task at hand. On the other hand, it may be something that is revelled in. As one worker said to me: "I find that it is made almost impossible ever to disagree with Major Davidson, because of who he is in the community... even when he's speaking on something about which his knowledge is limited". This deference can be an important conflicting issue for working groups.

The authority in social and working groups, and particularly where the social and practical aspects overlap as they do in rural communities moreso than in large cities. "Authority" then is bound up in the various dimensions of the working group, which includes traditional, social, historical and cultural aspects which have

to come to terms with the authority of organizational role and expertise.

Within the RCCs there appear to be various dimensions to these conflicts in authority and, given the dynamics of the situations, some groups appear to manage very well. One of the mechanisms of managing such potential conflict is formality in respective groups, but the risk here, as I mention elsewhere, is in the loss of open discussion. This in itself does not free a group of the underlying dynamics.

Authority in relation to 'expertise' has its own areas of contention, wherein the expertise that comes from the professional qualification may be at odds with that of experience. Ideally, they complement each other as certainly the former cannot replace the other as such, but certainly provide a sharper focus. As an issue of conflict for individual councils, however, this appears to be related to urban-rural as well as central and local authority issues. To some extent, universities are associated with 'town life' and academia the antithesis of 'rural graft'. Additionally, the 'new authority' is also associated with that 'imposed from the outside', which has its connections with that which hasn't developed from the rural experience (or isn't seen to be), is academically based and can provoke the 'they think they know it all' reaction, is to some extent rooted in town-life, which is partly the conflict which does exist with the Rural Department itself (Note 10).

The above description does not apply wholly to any of the community councils that I have met with, but rather as part of

overall culture. At the same time, however, each council benefits from and values the expertise (possibly of a different kind) and the energy that young professionals have brought with them to the rural community councils, just as each emphasises its reliance and its respect for the expertise within the Rural Department. In emphasising the underlying conflicts, I am taking the focus away from the predominating surface to look at the 'background noise'.

There are other types of authority within the Rural Community Councils. One interesting issue is that of women in the councils and two of the four that I have visited have women as the Directors. Both Ann Parsons and Pat McCarthy feel that the councils they work with have not discriminated against them on this basis in view of the male tradition and the positions of authority they hold. In the selection process at Avon prior to Ann's appointment, it had been said that 'they would not appoint a woman' and yet they were able to do this. Perhaps the fact that this became a discussible 'objection' beforehand enabled the executive committee to put this into perspective beforehand and both allowed them to make an appointment on the basis of appropriate skill for the task, and alleviated subsequent acting out of a traditional male monopoly of power. Similarly, a working through of this sort of issue in the selection process has allowed a woman to be appointed to a position of authority thus far held by men.

It is possible, however, that in this sort of situation the issue is not worked through, but that a decision reached is rather a reaction to a collective 'uncomfortableness', which may happen in organizations which pursue a rigorous 'equal opportunities' policy.

Similarly, there is the risk as occurs with equal opportunity organizations, that either racism or sexism is no longer an issue. Is it possible in a situation such as Avon, for example, (I'm not suggesting it is), that with five women and one man on the staff, the position is inverted?

Traditional authority figures in rural areas are not only important within the community councils for giving the work of the councils a standing in the respective counties, but may create authority conflicts where they become involved within the councils. In most counties, for example, it is traditional for the Lord-Lieutenant of the county to be the President of the RCC, which increases the social standing of the RCC and helps in other ways, such as fund-raising. As Meg Shotton pointed out to me, the Leicester RCC will get a much larger turn out for a garden party at the home of the Lord-Lieutenant than if it was held anywhere else. In the case of the Lord-Lieutenant, the role is maintained as a figurehead one.

In one of the RCCs I visited, one of the members maintained the social title of 'Squire', as the authority figure within a small village which has maintained its feudal characteristics (as far as possible). It is felt that his own expectations are that this 'authority' is carried with him into his role on the RCC executive, where he is still addressed by some of the longer standing members as 'Squire'.

Authority conflicts may be raised also at times of change in senior positions. It is always an issue for a new figure as to whether the group or organization will invest him or her with

what is needed by the role. This is further compounded by the previous post holder, at least in two ways. Firstly, if the predecessor was liked and respected, there is the issue of the loss for the group of that person, and the newcomer's acceptance is tied up in the period of 'mourning'. It will also mean that there is a big pair of shoes to fit. The second is where the previous post-holder was not viewed as particularly effective, and while this may make a newcomer's acceptance in post easier, the role itself may have lost some of its importance and the authority that should go with the post may be invested in other people and roles.

Furthermore, there are situations where the previous post-holder remains within the group in another capacity, which appears to happen within the executive committees at least (Note 11). The question may be then one of whether the group can shift its placing of authority to the new chairman, or whether the previous person has relinquished authority in name only.

In all these situations, there is inevitable conflict for groups in the discussion of issues which inevitably raise disagreements. A confusion in allegiances to different types of authority can make the clarification of priorities in relation to the discussion of a difficult topic an extremely fraught, if not impossible, task. There has to be space for someone, or the group, to question whether the 'discussion' has become one of conflicting authorities rather than one of rural issues.

The Size of Committees and Groups

When space for discussion about underlying dynamics that interfere with the task is limited, the question of size becomes important. In overlarge groups, this becomes impossible as the community councils have found, and the 'politics' become the stuff of the group. The degree of formality in a committee may be worth looking at in the same context.

Meetings obviously need structures, including time, which enable the group to focus on the task. This is one of the difficulties in very small groups, one of the issues for the staff working in groups of three, where informality makes the risk of 'chat' override the purpose of meeting and being able to reach decisions (Note 12). It appears one of the reasons where staff groups meet infrequently.

While meetings need structures, the risk of over-formality may preclude any discussion at all and therefore, in these instances, the structure appears to have become a blocking mechanism, a defence against any possibility of discomfort coming into the meeting at all. The formality becomes a means of keeping the meeting safe , but it also may mean that the meeting becomes meaningless , precluding discussion and potential disagreement, and become bogged down by non-involvement, sleeping members and absenteeism. This seems to be somewhat inevitable for overlarge groups, which are not a suitable venue for looking at conflicts, especially where personal and role issues get intertwined and in the large group disagreement, the argument is likely to break down into factions

along with the creation of an unwilling spectator group. There is also the possibility that the larger the group, the greater is the fear that if "the lid is taken off" the expression of underlying conflicts may become impossible to control.

In my first visit to Staffordshire RCC, I met with three different groups in the course of the day, beginning with the director and field officer, followed by attendances at the Finance and General Purpose meeting, at which there were eleven people present, and finally the Executive Committee, at which there were about twenty with a similar number absent. In the first situation, each referred to the other by Christian name. In the second, the policy was to stick to either the role title, "Mr Chairman" or "Director" or surname "Mrs Hazlehurst", but in practice about half of the name references in the meeting were by Christian name. In the Executive Meeting, there were no first name references at all.

One of the most important consequences of either overlarge meetings or those which become stuck and in which there is little or no discussion, is that the discussion which needs to take place inevitably takes place elsewhere. If it is to do with dynamic issues, these may take place in pubs and corridors, which may also happen with discussion about task, but one of the offshoots of this is that it is taken to a different and more workable committee or task group.

There are a number of issues here for committees. Firstly, if the work of (say) an executive committee starts to be done in the F & GP meeting only those who attend both groups can be truly

involved in the executive function. The executive then breaks into those who are involved and those who are partly involved but become less and less so. This is also a problem for organizations like the RCCs which have several managerial groups: the 'multiple members' can either monopolise or, as importantly, be seen to monopolise the executive function. So even where the work of different committees is reported in the most efficient way possible, the single membership members, either individually or, moreover, as a group, fantasise that the work of their committee is going on elsewhere, and behave as if they are excluded from the action (Note 13).

The need for the committees and those with the task of managing them, appears to be clarity about what should be happening where, and where overlap is unavoidable, then reporting back becomes an important function of the sub-group.

Time

'Time' has already been mentioned as an aspect of structure, and has various dimensions to its importance. It appears also to be one of the central factors in the differences between amateur and professional , not only by those in the RCCs but those otuside. As has been mentioned in relation to the availability of resources, time has been central within the voluntary sector and, in the past, has often overridden questions of skill and task. The management of time is an issue for Rural Community Councils, and my observations and discussions have raised a few issues.

One of the changes mentioned by all the RCCs visited has been that of the attitude to promptness of meeting starts, and the attitude to time in the pressure world of RCCs in the nineteen eighties has had to be radically different to the seventies. This change has started within the staff groups themselves, but the change is still in the process of working its way out from the centre to the individuals on the periphery and the organizations that the RCCs work with. This in itself is the source of many stresses for the staffs of RCCs.

One RCC director mentioned to me the difficulty he has in getting his chairman to meet with him at agreed times, rather than when it is convenient for him "to pop in" as it was in the old days, "at our leisure". Another difficulty mentioned is in relation to local bodies, "getting them to appreciate that the pressures on Rural Community Councils have changed". In one RCC, there was considerable difficulty with not offending some of the local parish councils who, "in the old days, were used to being able to ring up and always have someone there to have long chats".

A related problem is in getting outside groups to RCC meetings now with an appreciation that "we have to start on time". In the old days, outside groups were used to RCC meetings scheduled for the hour were not likely to get under way before twenty past. In one RCC, Avon, the greatest offender is felt to be the County Council, which may be saying something else about the relationship between the two.

The starting time of meetings also has to be related to its finishing time, and in some instances groups have clear starting

times, but no clarification on when they might finish, which has an effect on how urgent people feel it is to get them under way. In many instances, there needs to be a little flexibility about finishing, but it appears that too much is not helpful. At Stafford, for example, they rescheduled the executive meeting from two and a half hours to one and a half, and found that, under the pressure of having to make better use of time, the meetings did not lose out in terms of what they managed to get through. Additionally, by moving the meeting time forward slightly in the afternoon, it left a sizeable chunk of day left after the meeting in which to schedule other work and appointments, so the post-meeting time was found to become more useful also.

The pressure on time nowadays appears also to be used in part as an excuse for not doing things that perhaps need to be done. The two main issues in this, I have found, is the time put aside for staff groups to meet together and the time put aside for development and training work. I look at these two areas elsewhere, and they are not only questions of time. The attitude to the need for staff meeting together seems to vary from place to place and is also a question of priority. However, there are two crucial points for here: (i) where directors do see it as an important issue, it (time) should not be used as an excuse for not meeting; (ii) unless a time is put aside and it is written into the weekly programme (or fortnightly or monthly), it won't happen. As one director (Ann Parsons) said to me: "We should meet much more regularly, in fact, we need to. But we can't seem to find the time to get together with so much else going on". I would think that there are other reasons for not meeting which are more important but more difficult to acknowledge.

Roles Within Meetings

There are a number of issues which might be raised in discussing individual roles in committee meetings, but here I shall focus on the two that I have seen to be of importance in the meetings I've attended in the RCCs.

I have already talked at some length about the need for clarification for voluntary workers coming onto committee groups, particularly in relation to the task of the group and the expectations of the individual. This latter point becomes more important when the individual takes on an official role, such as Chairman. At one of the meetings I attended, I happened to be sitting next to the chairman, who was a voluntary member of the executive committee and this was the only other meeting in the community council he attended. In a short discussion after the meeting I asked him how he had come to chair the meeting and he said that he felt that it was primarily in default of anyone else wanting to take it on. The previous chairman of this particular group had resigned because he "was too stressed to be able to continue to do it".

There are a number of managerial issues here. Obviously, as has been mentioned, the question of time available is one that constantly rears its head in groups that involve voluntary workers, but it seems to be an important issue for people taking on offices that this is not the only consideration. Often, it seems that this is more likely to be the selection criterion when it is least appropriate, as people have the least time available for those roles that are most fraught, which seemed to be some of the implication as to why the previous chairman had resigned and that nobody else

was prepared to take on the role: "Good old Bill, he'll do it". The role of chairing a particular group within an organization has to be distinguished from the issue of managing it as part of the overall Community Council work, and it still needs to fall to the director to provide space for an incoming chairman of a particular meeting to clarify roles, discuss difficulties and provide support, rather than leave them to it.

It so happened that this particular meeting was of the Countryside Committee, and so one of the dynamics about the provision of support and the requirements of a role for, say, the chairman might come back to a basic question of whose meeting is it: is there some rivalry here about, for example, ownership or expertise? And whose is the managerial task here? Chairman, Director, Countryside Officer, or one of the other senior RCC figures?

One possible outcome is that the chairman's role becomes merely a nominal one, or it may be that this was the intention. One consideration is (I'm not suggesting that this is the case here) that in relation to selection of the chairman in the first place, a criterion may be that the role has always been held by a senior man (by 'senior' I mean long-serving) and that it's a figurehead role. He may, in the end, do little more than open and close the meeting. The importance here is for the community council management to consider what particular roles hold.

One of the meeting dynamics appeared to be that of conflicting authorities and is something that groups in RCCs (and other organizations) must often have to work with. A further dimension, particularly from an individual standpoint, is the stress that arises from the conflicts and energy used in filling multiple roles.

In this particular meeting, the Countryside Officer was placed (and placed herself) in a number of positions at the same time. At one level, the lack of clarity of the Chairman's role meant that to a degree she had taken this on as well, presumably because she was the person who had prepared the agenda and the material in the meeting was the focus of her work for the RCC. Quite rightly, because she was so central to the meeting, it was inappropriate for her to lead it as well, but in 'running it' she is possibly less able to focus on discussion issues. On one level, then, there needed to be some clarification made between her role and that of the chairman.

She was also the secretary for the meeting, and while the discussion proceeded, she took notes at the same time. It was explained to me that this sometimes happened because of the lack of secretarial resources, but in this event, it would appear that it would be more appropriate for one of the other committee members to have done this.

This issue about the staff, including the director, of the community councils being 'secretaries' is an interesting one particularly at a time of changing roles for RCCs. One director I met with (Simon Smith) said that the largest chunk of his time was taken up in writing up the minutes of meetings and the frustrations that he appeared to have about this and the ambivalence about the appropriateness of it as a directorial function, seemed to weigh heavily on his reputation for apparently getting them out late fairly consistently.

This secretarial role is obviously bound up in history, and is also part of the older role of the RCCs, including the roles of the Development Commission and the NCVO. The previous Chief Officers (mostly called appropriately 'secretaries'), provided a support function to the resources in the local voluntary organizations and the committees, where the 'authority' and the 'expertise' about rural issues and the quality of rural life was firmly placed. Secretaries of the Rural Community Councils appear to have been not so much experts and professionals as facilitators. The function for staff now requires that it has its own secretarial support. At the present time, the staffs of the community councils are still at the cusp of this change in functions and consequently there appear to be differing expectations about roles and the authority they have. In some instances, such as in the one mentioned here, individuals find themselves meeting all the expectations or trying to, and in the pressure that this entails, have even less time to sit back and examine whether this is appropriate or not.

There is an issue for the individuals here also, and the attempts to meet everybody's expectations may not be merely due to the pressures of the situation outside the individual concerned. There is also the issue for the individual about 'having to do it all', either in terms of feeling to somehow fail if one doesn't meet all the demands, whether they're appropriate or not, or in terms of sharing authority. The answer would appear to lie in finding the right kind of space to look seriously about the appropriate limitations of roles and tasks.

E. DELINEATION OF CHAIRMAN AND DIRECTOR ROLES

In the Rural Community Councils that I have visited, the degree of clarity between the roles of the chairman and director varied. As Ann Parsons said to me, "it's one of those grey areas", and this relates to both the tasks taken on and the areas of responsibility. Nevertheless, the general distinctions are clear.

In the broadest terms, the chairman, as head of the executive committee has a clear role in being responsible to see that the general policies laid down by the membership, and "refined" by the executive, are carried out in the work of the community council. In keeping an outside perspective on this, then, the chairman is at least one step removed from the day to day working of the council and is required to sanction the work carried on within it.

The director is responsible for the management of the day to day working of the community council, including management of the staff. The extent to which, then, the work to be done by the community council is decided within the executive committee or by the staff appears to be the area of greatest potential conflict, but in terms of what I have seen, there appears to be less conflict around this than one might have expected. Certainly it has been an issue of enormous conflict for at least one of the RCCs in the recent past under previous chairmen.

There are various factors which appear to relate to the areas of grey in the community councils I have visited:

(i) The length of time that the chairman and director have been with the council, both individually and in respect to each

other. This includes the consideration of who has been there the longer time and who considers him/herself to be "the more senior partner".

(ii) The amount of time the chairman, as a volunteer, has available to the work of the RCC and, in relation to this, the amount of contact that he has with the day to day work.

(iii) The role that the director sees for him or herself (though this may be related also to that which the chairman takes on). For example, in one of the RCCs, the director sees her role as needing to be available at community house as much as possible, which leaves considerable outside 'managerial' and 'public relations' work to the chairman who has the interest, skill and time for this.

(iv) Expectations of outside bodies in terms of whom they are used to meeting with. This may be of particular concern where younger directors have taken over from older officers and have to make inroads into 'the old boy network'. I am pointing this out as an issue that has been raised and not as necessarily a 'right solution'.

(v) The extent to which the role of director is accepted by the RCC as a whole as having changed from the more 'secretarial' one which appears to have predominated into the seventies.

(vi) The personal relationship between the chairman and director and the extent to which this can either tolerate "shades of grey" or perhaps not allow anything else.

There are various comments to make about the degree of overlap between the roles of chairman and director and the points raised

above. For example, a close personal relationship between a chairman and director (or any other working pair for that matter) does not necessarily make for a good working relationship. The personal relationship may also mean a collusive one rather than a helpfully critical one, and "support" in practice may end up being unquestioning support which is both limited in value and may in certain circumstances be positively destructive (Note 15).

Where roles and areas of responsibility appear to, or in practice, overlap, it seems essential that at least in formal role terms delineation of responsibilities are clear. This then can act as an 'insurance policy' against the risks that will at times inevitably ensue. Such risks and downfalls might be:

(i) Disagreements about a course of action. In this case, the limits of each person's responsibility should be clear, particularly, say the point at which the lines of policy become the particulars of practice, which would appear to be the crucial difference between the responsibilities of the chairman and the director.

(ii) The lack of clarity about the management of particular tasks. For example, in one RCC the Chairman dealt with a considerable amount of the outside statutory body negotiation and public relations , and the overlap between his role and the director's in this area had led to a lack of clarity in relation to the management of the three yearly Development Commission visit to the RCC. The overlooked areas here had underlined, as do other instances, the need for good communication and discussion between director and chairman particularly where there is more sharing of responsibility (Note 16).

(iii) The weaknesses of at least having a clear delineation of responsibility may be shown up particularly at times of change in the RCC, say at the inception of a new director.

Traditionally RCCs, and to an extent this appears to apply to the voluntary sector in general, the informal structure of organizations has been more dominant than formal lines of authority. One problem arising out of this (and it is one of the current aspects of the conflict in change) is the extent to which the authority of the constitution is outweighed by the authority of tradition. A potential source of great conflict within the RCCs which might focus on the chairmen and directors, particularly the 'new' directors, is which each looks to in sanctioning respective powers. A great difficulty arises where the director may say "well look, here it is written down in black and white", and the chairman says "yes, but that has been written down for years, but we've always done it like this".

At this point the role of the executive committee is all important, and it appears crucial that in this the executive committee is not comprised of factions representing interests. This seems to be a crucial area where, say, independent members of the executive whose views are respected are in a position to be listened to as 'outside' arbiters in very difficult situations.

The above areas of conflict which I have focussed within the chairman - director relationship may equally be focussed on different individuals or groups, for example, the executive and staff groups as wholes, or the chairman's part described above may be taken by a different individual in the executive who has been long serving

and very actively involved in the work of the RCC. Similarly, the situation above might be turned on its head as, for example, the director may not want to respect 'constitutional' directives but prefer instead to have, say, an unaccounted for role and a 'free' hand which had been enjoyed under a previous chairman and committee.

F. THE STAFF GROUP

The central task of management for the directors of rural community councils, is to see that the work of the council is done and this includes aspects of group and people management in addition to considerations of the task to be carried out.

Organizational and Private Lives

In larger bureaucracies, the delineations between work and private lives are much clearer and therefore the task of deciding what is or isn't to do with the life of the organization is made into a simpler one. Whether or not the consequences of this are better or worse is not a subject for this paper. This overlap between organizational and personal welfare is also an aspect of the culture of rural (or any smaller) communities, where personal, social and work lives are intertwined, and therefore is an added consideration when looking at the background against which rural community councils define roles and tasks (Frankenburg, 1966). For those more familiar with the boundarying of role functions in bigger social settings and large organizations, such delineations appear more straight forward.

In this section I am looking at the dynamics of the staff groups. Other aspects of this are considered in looking at particular roles within the community councils. Furthermore, the size of the staff groups in the rural community councils (three to six) is another dimension of the closer personal contact and its relation to the work relationship which has to be considered. While each of the staff groups that I met with made a clear distinction between their work and private lives in that one was not seen as an extension of the other, the boundaries between the two are inevitably blurred by demands on family or private time for RCC work and, secondly, that any outside crisis that an individual may be going through must affect the group as a whole by the mere fact of the percentage input that one individual has to the total. One of the decisions for the managers, then, is to decide where to make allowances in relation to outside and personal considerations, not merely in relation to the obligations to the individuals, but also in terms of the welfare of the organization. In larger organizations, personal crises are much more easily absorbed by the group as a whole which, equally, may mean that the individual may be more isolated in the bureaucratic situation with the clear distinction being made between person and role. Much has been written on this.

Responses to Stressful Situations:

(i) Absence

The increased pressures on staff groups in recent years appear to have increased the instances of illness and absence in rural community councils in recent years, which has in its turn increased

the stresses on the small staff groups. In one of the RCCs I visited (Avon), the field officer and the principal assistant between them lost six months in 1982 through illness and accident. In another the director felt that part of her obligation to the countryside officer who had just become a father, was that he needed to spend time away from the community council and that she needed to make sure that he did that. While she was looking to his 'personal needs', perhaps, it was also seen as looking to the interests of the RCC (Note 17).

One of the most referred to stresses in RCC staff, was the pressure that was added by 'crisis' situations that demanded instant action, often in circumstances when there was no 'slack' in which to take up additional work. There are various dimensions to this.

In the first instance, this was related to the overall increase in demands on RCCs that had meant that there was less slack than there was in the late seventies. The reasons for this loss of slack is dealt with elsewhere, as this is an issue in itself. Whereas previously 'crises' extended the RCCs more; now it means pushing a set of resources beyond the limits of endurance. The extent to which staff groups as well as the individuals within them have this resilience is an important factor.

In current circumstances, the demands are to be able to work beyond these apparent limits of endurance. I say 'current', because I see that an urgency for RCCs appears to be a need to look seriously at their functions in order for this not to be seen as an indefinite ongoing situation: the consequences will become more serious. At the same time,I also see it as being an inevitable outcome of

the changes that have occurred within and around the community councils (the two being related), and at present the RCCs are existing in the time lag between changing circumstances and the organizations themselves catching up with these changes.

An important factor in the present climate then is both group and individual responses (including defences) to the increasing pressure. This is related also to selection issues which I have discussed with various people and the difficulties in the interview situations of being able to assess how new staff or directors may respond to pressure or what their limits are. Often responses are not within any conscious motivation on the part of individuals: minor illness, for example, is a common safety valve while more serious illness or even "accident" can be symptomatic of the over-stressed individual. It may also relate to the understretched individual. The important factor then is the workload: personal capacity match.

(ii) The opening and closing of role boundaries

Both groups and individuals have defensive responses in relation to such vulnerabilities and perhaps the central one is to do with the amount of sharing in staff roles. Either group or individual or both can in such circumstances define their job areas more closely, so that in the absence of another staff member or where there is a new demand, the response may be "... but that's not my area", or "... Mr Newton is away today, you can phone him tomorrow". Obviously, there are various degrees in this, and the greatest problems for the RCC as a whole is when the individual who is

responsible for a particular area is away for any length of time, not merely in terms of illness, but also in relation to the taking of vacations. The outcome, where staff are 'indispensable' can be one of two things: the work of the RCC suffers when they are not there, and this includes the 'image' of the RCC, or the individual never feels free to go on holiday. In one instance, a countryside officer had not taken a holiday for three years.

Perhaps one of the 'pressure points' in this is in the relationship between staff whose roles are 'responsive' and 'initiatory' and those whose functions are apparently well established. Broadly speaking, these might focus on the Countryside Officers and Deputies or Principal Assistants, representative to a degree of the changes in the functions of rural community councils in the last ten years. Individual responses to increases in demands might then be to see their own roles more clearly established terms, leaving the 'responsive role' elsewhere, which to some extent corresponds to the expectations of the job descriptions of the countryside officers. The need then is for this to be looked at by the staffs of the community councils and as a management task would, in the first instance need to be taken up by directors.

I have mentioned above that either group or individual or both can define their job areas more closely, which may protect either against increased demands in times of additional demands, but at the same time increasing the pressures on the group of the indispensibility of individuals. A further dimension of stress and conflict is added in the groups when there is disagreement about whether the roles should therefore be more closely defined or have

more flexibility. Within this, the defences mentioned add to the isolation of individuals in their work tasks.

Finance as a Stress Factor

The other single source of stress mentioned by the community councils was 'money'. This also has various dimensions of differing importance from county to county, and it shows its effects in various aspects of the community councils' work and relationships.

At the centre of the issue is the feeling within the community councils that there is insufficient finance available to them (regardless of source) for them to do the job that they would like to do and the one that is expected of them. These expectations relate to both their local clients as well as the statutory authorities. This whole area of finance becomes a very complex one, not only in terms of material realities, but, perhaps more importantly, in the psychological life of the organization. One of the arguments presented about finance as an issue in rural community councils is that they could manage what they have better. While this may be so (and it is something that is conceded by some of the RCCs themselves), the temptation is to regard this as a general argument concerning the critical financial situation that RCCs face. It is also a defence against the apparent unsolvability of the situation. Outside of the community councils, I have not heard it said that they do have sufficient money to do what they need to do, but rather that there is no more available from current resources. This focusses mostly on the Development Commission, whose share of RCC financing has increased in recent years, not

merely in real terms but also in the light of the decreases from other sources. Finance is certainly one of the central factors in inter-organizational tensions.

One aspect of the "better management" argument, is the assumption that where there is any apparent wastage, then there is room for improvement. This is an extremely debatable subject. The lack of room for error and wastage in the life of an organization, not merely in financial terms but in relation to other resources, can have serious implications for its efficiency, including the added pressures that are put on it where the consequences of creative errors cannot be absorbed. Innovative work is severely restricted. This has already been mentioned in relation to the resources of staff and time. Additionally, the increased demands made on community councils for 'tight budgeting' can add both pressure and time onto, say, the management task, which means less available for the management of other aspects of the council's work. It is an insufficient argument, therefore, to be able to point to areas of a community council's administration and say "but, you could do some saving here,... or here". Obviously, there has to be an optimum, but the question is one of optima rather than absolutes.

One of the variations in different councils is to do with the amount of reserve funds that they have. This appeared to be a very important factor in relation to the amount of stress expressed in RCCs and seemed very related to the history of the councils, the length of time they had existed, whether they owned their own properties or whether they had money in reserve from or for this. Directors inherit different financial situations and

this appears to have a direct relationship to the stress that respective RCCs express.

The continued funding by the Development Commission now seems relatively assured, but as this has been achieved, funding from other sources in some instances has become more tenuous. The major area of concern for RCCs in this respect is that of county council funding, and the state of Local Governments financial situations, including issues such as the possible effects of the Rate-Capping bill which applies most of all to urban Labour local governments, has added a variable dimension to the stresses on RCCs. This applies, in my sample, to Avon and Leicester, who have more difficult relationships to manage in this respect and, in the case of Avon, there appears to hang the very real threat of the withdrawal of funds. Nevertheless, there remains an issue totally aside as to whether community councils manage the relationships with the statutory bodies for better or for worse: the question remains as to the examination of the quality of the relationship that might be improved by action from the RCC.

In relation to this split in funding, one of the important aspects of this is the effect on the staff group. In each of the RCCs the staff have a recognised source of funding in relation to salaries: the Development Commission pays the salaries of the Directors and the Countryside Officers, while Assistant and Deputy wages come from the general fund and, most noticeably, the local governments. The threat of withdrawal of county funds then does not direct the threat equally among the staff, and while this points straight at the Assistants, there are complications for the groups-as-wholes in relation to this.

Fund-raising is another dimension of the financial aspect of RCCs. At the time of their inception, it was envisaged that the community councils would be supported primarily from local voluntary funds. In practice this has never been a viable possibility, primarily because the work of the councils is too broad on the whole and not sufficiently related to those areas of communities' social and emotional lives to create an urgency in response. Some councils do have an active fund-raising element and it is clear that the ratio between the input and the return is very high. At Leicester, for example, Meg Shotton is the centre of the fund-raising there, a role which she seveloped when the RCC was primarily engaged in its traditional role. She came there then with an interest in this and an expectation that that would be part of her work. As she points out, she now has to put a very strict limit on the amount of RCC time she uses for this activity, as the returns don't justify the enormous amount of time required especially in relation to looking at the overall needs of the RCC and the use of her time. Fund-raising is carried out in her own time.

The directors of RCCs then are faced with having to weigh up the amount of time the RCC can put into fund-raising within the list of priorities for their overall work. At Cornwall, for example, the RCC was able to raise £500,000 for a Body Scanner appeal for the county hospitals in just three months because of its appeal to the county residents, but the RCC itself doesn't attract the same emotive recognition. An issue for future consideration, however, might be to charge an agency fee to coordinate such an appeal (Note 18).

The whole area of agency fees in the traditional work is an area of concern for rural community councils. What appears to have happened over periods of years is that the agency fees charged have fallen behind the extent of the services provided, in real terms. One of the tasks for directors has been to realign the two again and to build in realistic increases in the fees charged. In different RCCs this appears to have been handled in differing ways, and where confusion continued to reign, it seems closely related to confusions about the roles of RCCs in relation to clients, the management of demands and expectations, and the lack of clarity in both RCCs and clients viewing the service provided as a professional one, or as being something offered by one voluntary group to another. This is a crucial consequence of RCCs continuing to view themselves as purely voluntary bodies and having a collective guilt mobilised by the consideration of charging a realistic agency fee. The reality to me in the end seems to be that the RCCs end up doing, or feeling that they should do, the fund-raising in order to finance the bodies they service. Whereas, the bodies they are servicing may have more grassroots power to attract voluntary contributions they need to pay the RCCs for a very professional set of services.

The above points relate, as mentioned, to the RCCs continuing to regard themselves primarily as a voluntary body, which in part is bound up in council membership. This 'culture' within the RCCs has also had a strong influence on discussions about pay levels for professional staff, around which there has been considerable conflict within the general argument that it is not acceptable for people who join a volunteer organization to be quibbling about the pay they get. While in more recent times there appears to have been

considerable shift in the attitudes of the councils towards this, it remains as an underlying conflict and, at times, not so underlying. This is not unconnected to the issue of agency fees.

Recognition

An area of major stress for community council staff revolves around the need in all working groups (and individuals) for recognition and acknowledgement of worth. This is connected also with the 'esteem' that is shared by the group and those outside. There are various considerations in this.

The most obvious aspect of this is to do with money. Apart from considerations of salary being commensurate to the demands of the task, which, in community councils it appears not to be, there is the dimension of salary as a source of 'feedback' about the value of the work. The discrepancy between the inputs of the working groups and the financial acknowledgement is, in itself, a source of stress for the staffs of the community councils and, as with other aspects of dissonance in working groups (cf. Festinger, 1957), the outcome in the long term would be that the dissonance must be reduced. In other words, the stress can only be reduced by either an increase in recognition and acknowledgement (and pay is a dimension of this) or the amount of input is decreased to be commensurate with the money paid. This view holds that "you only get what you pay for in the end". This of course puts to one side the question about who should be responsible for the increase in pay, but this is an issue aside from the inevitable consequences. This is also related to other aspects of 'defences' against increasing

demands and expectations mentioned earlier. The other possibility of diminishing the dissonance is for the individual to increase the importance placed on some other form of reward attached to the activity. The link in history between the churches and voluntary work provides a good example of this - the spiritual rewards of Christian charity - and this part of the culture of voluntary sector work has been quite central, as it continues to be. Part of the double-bind then is in the elevation of financial reward seems to imply a diminishing of the motivations behind the virtue of Christian charity. At the borderline of the voluntary sector, which the RCCs as intermediary bodies are, these value systems appear to be in conflict.

Other sources of feedback relate to aspects of job satisfaction and other acknowledgements, such as seeing something successfully completed, being 'thanked' in many sorts of ways. Individuals within the community councils all stress the degree of satisfaction from what they do, which is also bound up in the autonomy of their positions and their freedom to act. Consequently, the feelings of loss of independence is seen to be a threat to one of the main advantages of working for a Rural Community Council. One of the aspects of the problem of isolation seems to be tied up with the distance from sources of approval and acknowledgement of the work that community council staffs do.

Increases in expectations and demands, at least at an emotional level, then can also be translated into expressions of dissatisfaction at the quality of the work done. Undoubtedly in the seventies this was the case, to the extent that the continued existence of the

RCCs was seriously in question for reasons of their usefulness alone. Today to an extent there may be threats, or there are threats, but not for the reasons that they aren't needed. Nevertheless, the community councils today are fighting for both recognition and a recognition that they aren't now what they were ten years ago.

One of the problems of the diminishing contact with the Rural Department for RCCs, and the consequences of working at a distance, is in being able to make the distinction between generalised comments from particular ones. To an extent, it would seem that Rural Department communications through broadsheets and newsletters, including feedback from the Standing Conference, are generalised or may highlight a problem which is directed at a small number of RCCs. Generalized communications do not afford a recognition that a particular RCC may have gone to great efforts to right a particular anomaly in its work.

Familial Aspects of the RCCs

I have found also that psychoanalytic models of small working groups useful in looking at RCC staff group dynamics. The most central aspect of these for the present is in family models, which is illustrated by the number of references, in my discussions with individuals, such as "we're just like a family here, really". This may be accentuated more in RCCs by the size of the working groups and, in varying degrees, to the compositions in terms of age and sex. So while at one level the arrival of younger male directors in the "new" RCCs has created some conflict with older chairmen, or directors in looking at the arrivals of younger countryside officers,

and this conflict can be seen in terms of struggles over the 'direction' that RCCs should take, it might also be seen in relation to sons challenging fathers' authority. The same applies to women in relation to women. It may be that the conflict is not merely one to do with authority on its own, but would appear to be accentuated in the rivalries between men and men, women and women. The same distinctions do not appear to apply so much at more junior levels in the community councils: sibling rivalry is not gender related to the same extent.

The familial model can also be seen to apply in relation to different aspects of staff group dynamics, for example, in looking at the role expectations that group-as-a-whole or individuals have in relation to particular people or roles. Senior women, for example, may be expected (or expect) to fulfill maternal roles, particularly at unconscious levels, for the staff group, which may be in conflict with other aspects of positions of authority (Note 19). This has been shown to relate to the difficulty, in other organizational settings, in working groups accepting women in managerial roles and also for women taking them on.

Changes in Career Expectations

There are also questions relating to career expectations for staff in the community councils. Future prospects are an important dynamic of staff groups, and this applies to people at all levels of career development. It relates to aspects of the dynamics of change as well as considerations of training and development, which are discussed elsewhere.

One of the central tensions in the changes in community councils in the last ten years has been the shift from the appointment of retired service personnel to young professionals. The time can be a time of crisis for individuals and even though there are feelings of a release from other pressures, there is also the confrontation with aspects of being no longer useful, being 'obsolete' and so on. Often, or maybe more usually, this crisis is faced some years before retirement when individuals feel they are being passed over for the younger talent (Note 20). The change in RCC policy in the late seventies to an extent made this a double-headed crisis for some.

For the older generation of directors, the message at one level was that they were no longer useful; that the changes in the environment demanded that the whole task of the community councils, if they were to survive and to do the task needed, demanded a more dynamic and energetic approach. It was to an extent also a demand that was being enforced from the outside, both in terms of changes in the countryside and the national community council task. The changes needed in the community councils themselves, for complex reasons, could not be effected from within individual community councils and so for the RCCs to change and develop in accordance with outside demands, there had to be some facilitation and even pressure from outside: the SCRCC, the Rural Department, the Development Commission, Local Authorities. To some extent the 'fight' on behalf of "deposed" directors, might be carried on by sections of the executive committees that identified most closely with the existing directors. This is not merely a question of age:

in different circumstances one can envisage the situation the other way around.

Considerations of career development issues does not stop there, however. Younger directors are faced most acutely with the question of 'where to from here?' in a field that has no obvious move upwards and forwards. And for members of staff, the younger directors leave fewer opportunities on the horizon for promotion.

Previously, this possibility was more tangible with directors having the limitations of retirement age producing foreseeable openings, which has disappeared with the employment of young directors. This,it appears,has increased pressures in career development terms for both directors and members of staff, which heightens the rivalry between them.

The areas of ' traditional' and 'development' work in the community councils has been mentioned elsewhere. These in themselves appear in some instances to be a source of rivalries within the RCCs, where different parts of the staff regard either one or the other as being more important than the other. This division is more likely to be accentuated where the staff roles are delineated on the same basis (Note 21). Additionally, they are also a part of the legacy of the dynamics of change in the RCCs and the struggles over the direction and the 'more important work' as individuals of rivalrous factions see them.

The above point concerning the 'traditional' and 'development' work also appears to be expressed around the use of secretarial time and is accentuated in situations where the secretarial

resources are insufficient to deal with all the work that is required of them (Note 22). So apart from the demands made on time, which is a source of stress in itself for secretarial staff, they can become also a focus for the expression of other rivalries in the staff group.

Further consideration of the staff group will be made in relation to considerations of specific roles and positions.

G. THE CHIEF SALARIED OFFICER (DIRECTOR)

One of the first considerations in looking at the Chief Salaried Officer position is in terms of the title given to the role in each case. This is invariably Chief Salaried Officer, Secretary, Director, Chief Executive or Organizing Secretary. Elsewhere I have discussed some of the appropriateness of the use of 'secretary' within the original role context, and interestingly some Rural Community Councils continue to use this. To an extent, invariably, the role and the title reflect each other in different ways and while I don't present a conclusion here, it might be important for RCCs to consider seriously the title given to the CSO, as most have done. The ongoing ambivalence about the title in particular RCCs may be related to the ambivalence and conflicts around the role expectations on the parts of the RCCs and individuals within them. It relates closely to issues around Authority which was discussed earlier.

At Staffordshire, Simon Smith was originally entitled 'Organizing Secretary', which was outmoded by the members and changed to 'Chief Executive'. One of the effects of this, says Simon, was

to "open some doors" as it has tended to give him "more direct access to the Chief Executive of other authorities because "I'm now on equal terms... or so their secretaries think!" On the other hand, he feels that it has created the converse problem at more local levels, because "it makes me sound a bit pompous, at times".

I have throughout this paper referred to the Chief Salaried Officer as 'Director', and for the sake of simplicity I shall continue to use this term. Undoubtedly, this choice must also reflect something of what I personally see in the role.

The director position in the RCCs is, more than anywhere else, the focus of the various tensions, though it may be that in certain situations, a director may sidestep these and deflect them to somewhere else either within the organization or outside it. The role, however, is perhaps the pressure point in the network of the organizations from statutory bodies through to clients. This may be fairly axiomatic in that, in this project, the focus of the study is the task to be done by the Rural Community Councils, and the director is the manager of that task. This task may be seen at various levels, some of which may be done in collaboration with the chairman, but this is to distinguish where the ultimate responsibility of the day-to-day work lies.

As mentioned elsewhere, the task of the director of a community council may be made more difficult than that of the director of a large firm in that the latter has a broader management team with a range of skills that cover the management task. No one embodies all the skills in equal proportion that are required to manage an

organization, and in large organizations this is spread. Directors have various tasks to manage. In addition to the knowledge needed to manage specific rural tasks, they also need to manage staff issues both at group and individual levels, while distinguishing between personal and organizational considerations. There are administrative and financial considerations, as well as political and public relations issues. They are the boundary managers of the community councils, which involves controlling what comes into and goes out of the RCCs in terms of all their resources, as well as deciding what are or aren't tasks for the work of an RCC.

Community Councils are also the mediators between statutory and voluntary bodies, each with different cultures and expectations. In relation to this they are also to an extent the mediators between urban and rural concerns as well as between central and local authorities, which has an historical dimension. In addition to all this, the present generation of directors are also the focus of the change from one type of RCC to another, on its own an enormously skilful task.

In relation to this, the question of development and training is important as directors do need to develop quite quickly the skills related to all the above tasks which goes over and above the knowledge and initiative needed to deal with rural issues.

The shift in selection criteria to some extent has moved from one set to another: the need for professional rural advisors within a given salary range, has meant that some of the general management skills that the older directors had and which developed in their

service roles were lost, but will develop in younger directors also. Perhaps the crucial point is to do with the space that is allowed for these to develop and what sort of facilitation can be provided.

One of the aspects of the changes in the rural community councils is that directors now (as are other professional staff) are often not from the county itself, let alone from within the existing RCC. In such cases, the problems of being accepted can be greater.

Apart from the changes that have occurred outside the RCCs and which have been related to the changes within and hence the management task, there are other areas that have added to the task of directors. Manpower Services Commission projects have on their own increased the task to be done for those RCCs which manage them, not merely in terms of the amounts of finance that have to be managed, but also in terms of the input by the RCC in relation to the benefits that they get in return. Additionally, there are aspects of MSC projects that have had important consequences on the relationships within the RCCs: for example, MSC and RCC secretarial support.

Finally, the leadership style of the director has crucial consequences for the working of the staff group and the individuals within it. This might include the skills mentioned above, but it entails a quality over and above the sum of the parts. This on its own may affect the dynamic of the whole more than any other input into the staff group.

H. THE FIELD (COUNTRYSIDE) OFFICER

Clearly there are specific stresses on the Countryside or Field Officers in the Rural Community Councils. It is also important to note that my discussions with Field Officers and the observations made also relate to past experiences including those of directors who have filled this post previously.

The instigation of the Countryside Initiative Scheme in 1973 to some extent marked the beginning of the change in function of Rural Community Councils, although, at their inception, the role appears to have been focussed much more on 'conservation' issues. Nevertheless, the change in RCC function and particularly the conflict over interference from the outside put the Countryside Officers at the forefront of the conflict over the direction of and the authority in RCCs.

Norman Towner was appointed to the Staffordshire RCC when the Countryside Initiative Scheme was initiated by the Development Commission and the RCCs in 1973. He resigned from his job with an agricultural cooperative so that, even though he was taking a drop in salary, he would be working and advising on issues of conservation in the countryside, particularly, as was stressed in his interview, in an initiatory role within a new area of RCC development.

The outcome was very different to the expectation and he found himself, rather than being involved in issues of conservation and working "in the field", being "an office man" working on the already-established areas of RCC work. For seven years he was frustrated

in not being able to pursue "what he'd come to do" and with no recourse to any action outside the community council.

Such an example illustrates at least two things. Firstly, there is the stress caused by the discrepancy between expectations and outcomes, which this worker describes as being "at times unbearable". It illustrates also the complexity of the inter-relationship between RCCs and the Development Commission and where, say, intervention on the part of the latter would be regarded as "interference" in the autonomy of a community council, or acting to demand an accountability for the use of funds for a specific purpose. Moreover, there are the obligations to an employee caught in this type of split.

Defining the Task

In the present circumstances of the field officer's work, the greatest single stress, as he describes it, is "the backlog of work" that constantly grows through increasing demands and a growing list of things that "one maybe should be following up". In relation to this, the area that to me seemed most in need of improvement is in staff time spent discussing together and prioritizing the needs of the task. This is an assistance needed as an inevitable outcome of the conflicting qualities that are required of field officers, or anyone involved in the work of the present day community council. The role of field officer demands sufficient interest and concern about the quality of rural life, which provides the fuel for the initiatory and responsive task, but at the same time,

the role demands that the adviser be sufficiently outside of the emotive demands of the issues, to remain independent in the consulting role, neutral and discriminating not only in relation to the task itself, but in being able to decide which demands and needs that they should be responding to. It is impossible for an individual to hold all these boundaries constantly within the turmoil of powerful demands in different directions and it is this aspect of staff in relation to each other's tasks that appears at first look to be the area which might alleviate the pressures of the job in the absence of outside consultants.

Person:Task Match

This area of defining the task and putting some limits on the ceiling of demands made on countryside officers has been fairly constant in my discussions with field officers. The corollary, in present circumstances, was that for field officers to remain outside the turmoil and the conflicting demands of the task, they could do so only by not being sufficiently involved, which was the major problem with the "old" RCCs, which defended against apparently impossible demands by maintaining careful limits on the level of their involvement (Note 23). As with all jobs, the requirements of the task and the person employed need to match. Where there is a discrepancy in the person-task match, either the person or the task to be done changes in order to reduce the concomitant stress.

Salary

The area of remuneration for the job done appears to be a major area of concern for field officers. This can be viewed both in terms of the money paid in relation to the demands and expectations of the job, as well as comparisons with people in other sectors (say local authorities) who fulfill similar roles. Salary 'per se' is not the only consideration here as there are also considerations of personal expenses that come from the use of private cars, for example, that is not entirely absorbed by the organization. This was an issue raised in three of the community councils visited and is an illustration of the overlap for paid staff of where expectations are perhaps more in keeping with those of purely voluntary workers. This leaves aside the same question in relation to the expectations of voluntary workers.

In some community councils, where financial reserves are sufficient, interest free loans are offered to the Countryside Officers and in one of the RCCs visited, the director had made a case to the executive committee for a car to be provided for the use of the staff in field work. This was turned down by the executive. There are additional demands on field officers in councils where loans are not available. One field officer said it would have been impossible for her to do her job if she had not been given a car by a relative.

Current levels appear to tie in with the expectation that field officer positions are filled by young graduates who will stay for a limited period of time, though it is not clear whether this is part of a policy i.e. an expectation that is inherent in the

decision stages of salary making, or that the high turnover of field officers up to recent times has been an outcome of the level of salary in conjunction with other pressures of the post (Note 24).

Within the last two years at least, the decline in alternative opportunities for field officers appears to have increased frustrations. This relates both to opportunities outside the community councils, in local government work for instance, as well as within the councils themselves. In the seventies, there was an initial increase in internal promotion opportunities as chief officer positions became available in the years of policy change.

As the average age of field officers has crept into the higher twenties, as it has appeared to do, the external demands on them have increased in relation to the supporting of young families and the procuring of houses. One field officer who in the last three years has married and started a family says that whatever the realities of finance available, the fact is that now they are a one-salary family, his present salary is not enough to live on. He has no alternative but to continue to look for alternative employment. His director, while acknowledging what the loss of his experience will mean to the work of the community council, supports him in this.

The Development Commission was not prepared to comment on field officer salaries in response to my querying whether they thought that they were paid enough in relation to the expectations of the job, but underlined the problem of the issue of money available, both in relation to what was available to them as well as the issue of further financing by them of RCCs.

One of the conflicts within the RCCs themselves appears to have been related to the difficulties in discussing levels of salary with executive committees which see the community councils as voluntary organizations and therefore in which the level of salary should not be of primary concern (Note 25). This attitude in some instances has shifted at least to the extent that it is a discussible area.

Training and Development

Finally, there is the issue of training and development for Field Officers, and there are several dimensions to this which were raised in my discussions with both field officers and directors.

The major concern is that of money available, but to some extent it appears that this has become an umbrella which overshadows various underlying issues. Undoubtedly, however, finance for training is a major issue and a difficulty here is financing development either within the RCCs or by attending outside events, something else which is met within the general fund of each council would have to give way. It is therefore tied up in questions about the priorities for the use of finances in RCCs.

At a second level of consideration is the question of underlying attitudes to development and investment in it. One of the central aspects of the culture of volutnary organizations, appears to be in considering the work as 'being for others' along side of a lack of personal gain of those engaged in it. To some extent then, there feels to be an attitude that personal development in work within

the voluntary sector goes against the grain of the underlying culture and is therefore not appropriate. There are then strains of guilt attached to any personal development and training, regardless of considerations of it being a worthwhile investment for RCCs as organizations. This is also a difficult aspect of group culture to come to terms with, even if it is on the whole unconscious, and therefore other reasons are given for non-participation in development programmes, such as timing ("we'd go to such-and-such if only there wasn't such-and-such on"; "... if only we'd known earlier"; "... we can't afford it".) This is not to say that the excuses above don't have their relevance.

A third aspect of training and development is in relation to the range of programmes offered to community councils. This focusses particularly on the resources available within the Rural Department of the NCVO, which appears to limit the definition of "areas of need". The resources there do tend to focus on information and expertise about the issues rather than organizational and people-based aspects of the tasks and their management, which is where development needs at present appear to be most overlooked.

Fourthly, the venues for conference and training programmes have a large bearing on attitudes to attending events. The costs in time, effort and money to particular RCCs for London-based programmes has a relation to their attendance, although this may also be one of those complex areas of hidden agendas as, in looking at some very relevant programmes provided by the Management Development Unit of the NCVO, many of which are regionally based, it appears that relevant programmes are not so London-bound as assumed.

An important consideration in this is possibly the concentration on the Rural Department as the sole-source of development and support rather than the looking to the combined resources of the NCVO as a support system, which may be a reflection on the RCCs, the NCVO, the Rural Department or all of them.

The motivation behind attending training programmes has to be considered in the light of individual's overall career prospects. As one field officer has pointed out, the relevance of development is lessened considerably if "I see my own future needs being met only outside RCC work. What would I be developing for?"

In a climate of indispensibility of staff, it is difficult for the working group to graciously release one of its members to go away on a conference, when this means an increase in the workload of those left behind. This in turn creates a climate wherein it is difficult for any particular member to take the step to ask to go on a conference, even if it's for a day. This may also be closely related to fantasies and beliefs that training and development programmes are somehow 'holidays', which to some extent may be the case if they are chosen on the basis that they are "there to get away from it all for a few days".

Development is also related to some extent to "receiving the goodies" and can (I relate this observation from my experiences of working groups in other settings) become the focus of staff rivalries or jealousies in the absence of a development policy that encompasses the whole staff group and a clarity about why a particular individual should attend a particular conference or programme. One staff member may appear to be or may feel to be

being favoured. These are difficult areas of development considerations that have to be managed, but merely avoiding such difficulties may mean an absence of staff development and training.

I. DEPUTIES AND ASSISTANTS

In view of the radical changes that RCCs have undergone and are undergoing in relation to their functions, the Deputies and Assistants might be regarded as being that under most pressure when viewed from the perspective of individuals. While I have looked at the demands on the Chief Executive's role to change, this has in the main been achieved through the appointment of new directors with different skills, qualifications and expectations as older CSO's have retired. The pressure then has not been so much on the individuals to change as it has come through appointing new directors to match the changes in demands and the redefinition and expansion of the roles of RCCs. Similarly, with the countryside officers: they too were chosen in response to a new area of task and arrived with the change.

The situation for the Principal Assistants, on the whole, appears to have been quite different. The function of RCCs has for some changed around them, and the expectations of the job and the role definitions have changed with them.

In the changing conditions both within and without the Rural Community Councils, the forces have been for the assistant staff role to change and develop in various ways. At the same time, particularly where individuals are under stress, there are forces

of resistance at work, which may come either from the individual, but usually from the group as well. The greatest degree of development appears to have occurred where there is a turnover of personnel, but to conclude that this is the only way, is to ignore not only other possibilities but underlines a tendency for groups to scapegoat. The greatest need then appears to be in looking to role development, as has occurred in some RCCs, but this requires a willingness and flexibility on the part of both individuals and organizations.

The expansion of the Principal Assistant's role has occurred, it seems, broadly in two ways. Firstly, in the expansion of the function of RCCs generally, it has expanded correspondingly to take on work previously done by the Chief Officer. In Leicester, for example, Meg Shotton's role expanded late in the previous director's term to include Administration and since that time she has also taken on the Parish Council advisory work (although has dropped the Village Halls advisory). The expansion of her role has freed the director to be more involved in the field. Additionally, she has had to change the nature of her involvement in local voluntary work.

The other aspect of broad change has been for the tendency for the Principal Assistants' role to be swallowed up by the expansion of other roles. In Staffordshire, the Principal Assistant's position has for the time being disappeared, and this change is corresponding to an expansion in the technological aspects of the community council, which is aimed at, in the first instance, reducing administrative time and expanding demands and pay for secretarial

and support staff. The Staffordshire situation is very much at the point of transition.

In Cornwall, the position is comparable to that in Staffordshire, but perhaps further advanced. Avril Baker came to the Community Council in 1979 as a shorthand typist within the secretarial staff. At that time also the Executive Committee decided not to appoint a new Assistant, which was partly because of finance. Avril's role developed beyond the secretarial function to envelop parish council work. As this latter part of her work developed, it freed the director both from a large section of her previous workload which could be directed to other areas and, secondly, it released the director from having to be constantly on hand in the office. Avril handles telephone enquiries in many areas of the RCC's work. In her own time she is also attending a computer course, which will add to the skills within the community council.

There are various forces at work which appear to inhibit the expansion of assistants' roles. Firstly, there are factors which relate to the extent to which individuals wish to change the functions that they have developed over years. In some instances it would seem that individuals welcome the change, in others the unknown is less welcome.

Secondly, there are factors which relate to aspects of organizational change mentioned earlier where, in particular, the demands on the RCCs and individuals represent such an "explosion" that a removal of tight role boundaries may plunge individuals into positions of increased uncertainty. Furthermore, the instances already of Rural Community Councils dispensing with assistants places

an enormous stress on that role in other councils and it is very understandable, particularly in a situation where the position is relatively undisguisable that the individual strategy in dealing with the concomitant anxiety is primarily a defensive one. Additionally, either individuals or groups or whole organizations expend large reserves of energy merely coping with the anxiety of the threatened situation, which minimises the resources to expand at the same time.

The expansion of any role in any organization will, except in relation to entirely new functions, mean that others within the group also have to review their own roles, and the reluctance to give up areas of interest on the part of others, or to collectively review roles and areas of responsibility, will also result in a blocking of overall development or that of an individual.

The radical expansion of RCC function from the late seventies, along with the arrival of Countryside Officers and a change in criteria for the selection of Chief Officers, to some extent appears to have decreased the prestige attached to the traditional RCC work at least within some RCC staffs, though not necessarily within the whole membership, which is reinforced by the relationship between sources of funding and development work. Within staffs where the roles are divided between traditional and development work, there appears to also be some division between the more interesting and prestigious functions and, certainly, more recognition and feedback from statutory bodies.

An important source stress for deputies and assistants is the area of career development and succession expectations. In

the change of policy regarding the age of incoming directors as well as a shift in the focus of the skills needed by the organizations in changing circumstances of the late seventies and eighties, individual expectations in some instances (probably many) had to change with them. This is an enormous source of conflict and stress for individuals, especially in the short term but possibly (and this may depend on the support from the organization) in the long term. Some may solve the longer term stress by leaving, but the situation for the individual will be exacerbated if there is not this choice.

The pressure on one individual almost inevitably means a concomitant stress on others, even if feeling to have caused another's difficulty, or that stress on one also means a stress on the whole of which he or she is part. The group then needs constructive support in such circumstances.

The salary situation for deputies and assistants also has its unique characteristics. While it may be argued as to whether the levels are sufficient, Chief Officers and Field Officers salaries are attached to Public Service scales and are dealt with as an issue aside by the Development Commission in the funding of RCCs. Assistants, however, have not secured such tenure, except where they are officially designated as Deputies and, even then, the salaries might come from the general fund. An Assistant may be paid at the discretion of the community council which leaves him very vulnerable to, in real terms, a decreasing wage. Furthermore, in areas where local authorities are threatening to withdraw funding, the direct threat to Assistants is greater. To an extent then, the threats

to RCC staff are not spread evenly as any cuts single them out moreso than any other full-time staff. (This is an issue aside from the eventual outcome as to how an RCC may deal with a local authority cut). To some extent, it is understandable that assistants may not be willing to share the increased pressures that are placed on RCCs when, at least from where they stand, it might appear that they aren't being given an equal share in security from vulnerability at a time of threat.

While one might be talking here about a vicious circle between the demands for an expanding and changing role in a changing environment, and the threat of extinction of an obsolete role and shrinking finances and hence enormous threat which provokes defence and resistance to change, the answer to breaking the circle would appear to have to begin with an examination by RCCs of assistants' roles in relation to other full-time staff, as some RCCs have done, even if the initial motivation was that of chance.

J. SECRETARIAL STAFF

The question as to whether secretaries (typists etc.) are regarded as part of the staff or as an appendaged group is both an issue in itself and related to other factors.

The extent to which secretarial staff role boundaries are clearly drawn at the extent of secretarial tasks of typing reports composed by the 'professional' staff, and acting as receptionists in telephone enquiries, appears to affect the way that both the secretarial staff and the professional staff regard them as "support"

as against "staff". Additionally, this is related not merely to their present function, but also to the way that they see their roles may develop. The degree to which they are seen as separate groups appears to vary from county to county.

At Avon the boundary appears to be drawn most clearly (in terms of the RCCs I have visited) between staff and support. The situation at Staffordshire appears to have been thus far similar to Avon's, though this may be at an interesting point of transition in the light of other organizational developments, which may well break down lines of demarcation. The absence of any Assistant staff points in the direction of an expansion of the secretarial role into the areas of professional work along with concomitant technological changes.

The future for Staffordshire may well be, as mentioned, similar to that now in Cornwall where the secretarian function has expanded to include work previously done by the Principal Assistant and the Director. Nevertheless, this expansion has focussed on one individual at Cornwall, and so there are still identifiable groups with a link person between the two. Even so, secretarial staff have been given areas of responsibility outside of the secretarial function.

Doris Medlicott has been a secretary with the Leicestershire RCC for eighteen years. She sees a clear demarcation between her role and that of the 'professional staff', although with her experience of the community council and her close association with the Deputy Director, Meg Shotton (they came to the RCC at approximately the same time) fudges other aspects of the boundaries

between the two. Relative experience then appears also to be a factor in the overlap of the groups. Furthermore, Doris is expected to take on some of the administrative functions currently performed by Meg when the latter retires in 1985. At Leicester, the use of the term "the staff" implies the whole staff group, moreso than anywhere else. Possibly an important factor in this is that at Leicester there is an (approximately) monthly staff meeting, which includes the secretarial staff. In this situation then the staff group includes the whole, with demarcations of role within it.

The distinction between the two views, however, does not relate merely to a question of policy but to various issues in the dynamics of the groups which may be beyond any decision or conscious intent. An example has already been given in the long working collaboration between Meg Shotton and Doris Medlicott at Leicester which may provide a greater nucleus of group identification beyond role definition. Avon, partly because of its short history, does not have a similar nucleus of long association within the paid staff which exists, if anything, within the executive.

An important factor, both in relation to potential stresses as well as group identification issues, for the secretarial staff, is the question of salary. The rate of pay for secretarial staff in Rural Community Councils is well below that which they would receive in either the public or private sectors and therefore, to some extent, the type of contract that they have with the community councils falls somewhere between that of paid staff and volunteers. The conflicts that accrue from this position at present would appear to require that secretarial staff have a high level of

satisfaction and enjoyment from their jobs, have a strong commitment to the work of the community councils and the voluntary sector and enjoy a pleasant working environment, where the degree of appreciation of considerable personal input is high.

As with other staff, demands and organizational functions have occurred at an extremely rapid rate relative to other conditions of work and to some extent the secretarial staff are at present working within the time lag of matching expectations with compensations. Some Rural Community Councils have got some way at looking at the conditions of work for paid secretarial support staff in looking, at a first step, of finding ways of improving salaries commensurate with the work done, or relatively so. This is the case at Staffordshire, where an increase in pay for secretarial staff along with an improvement in office equipment (including computer) is planned to offset the loss of one full-time assistant staff member.

In the main, three factors are seen to contribute to a re-looking at the conditions of work for Secretarial staff. Firstly, organizational developments referred to elsewhere have contributed to an expansion of the roles of secretarial staff. These include an increase in the workloads of RCCs in general, greater demands on more professional standards of work and an examination of the conditions of work for other RCC staff in many councils.

Secondly, with the expansion of RCC functions and the needs for more secretarial support, demands on time have increased considerably. This factor is particularly relevant in community councils which either manage Manpower Services Commission schemes

or use MSC Community Programme staff in temporary employment to offset the demands on secretarial staff. In Staffordshire, the demands on the regular secretarial staff time increased from between fifteen to forty hours per week, but with no additional money available for services rendered. For the fifteen hours work per week, staff at the RCC were paid (c.) £1,500 per annum, (at a rate of approximately £1.60 per hour with no extra paid for hours worked above the fifteen per week.) This situation became more stressful with the advent of Community Programme temporary staff who are paid at a rate sometimes in excess of £2.20 per hour (Note 26).

Finally, there is the area of office equipment used by secretarial staff that has been referred to in various parts of this paper. Cornwall Community Council have improved their office equipment considerably in recent years with support from district councils, in response to work done. This includes word processor and computer facilities as well as dictaphones which have economised the use of secretarial and staff time considerably. At Leicester, Meg Shotton during an interim period as acting-Director in 1981-2 replaced the typewriters which had been in use "for possibly twenty years" and since then they have carried out their own feasibility study on the use of a computer, which they are now set to go ahead with. The Development Commission itself is sponsoring two pilot grant schemes with computer equipment in RCCs (in Oxford and Suffolk). As has been mentioned to me by more than one source, one of the greatest difficulties in RCCs updating equipment in order to become more efficient, is the "burden of image":... "as charities, we're supposed to be hard-up and amateurish and having computers doesn't go with the expectations".

For the less well off community councils, such as Avon, breaking the poverty-efficiency circle then becomes an even greater task.

XI. FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

The initial responses to the Working Paper by the Rural Department are included in Chapter IX because these comments were made prior to revision and the sending of the paper to the four RCCs. This was at the beginning of June, 1984. By now David White was also very interested in what kind of response there would be and we agreed that if there was no feedback after four weeks then I would contact each of the directors and "prompt".

The response from the new Director at Staffordshire was almost immediate and, interestingly, to David White who felt that it was not unrelated to an eagerness to show a degree of efficiency, on the part of the new director, to the Rural Department. The comments made about it, referred almost exclusively to the notes I'd sent to the chairpersons of the meetings I'd attended and I suspected that the Working Paper itself had been given little attention, apart from where Staffordshire itself was mentioned. This, however, seemed a reasonable response from someone new, both to position and place. Any follow-up meeting also seemed of little value although I had thought that perhaps Norman Towner might like another visit.

In order to put some limitations on contact points in follow-up, it was agreed (at my suggestion) at the time of my first meetings that I would go only through the Directors: after the Working Paper I would not contact other members of staff directly without discussion having first been agreed by the "gatekeeper", the Director.

A further limitation - for me - was that of time. My term as a full-time student was ending in October and it was my intention to submit my thesis for the end of 1984 deadline. I therefore put an end of August deadline on fieldwork and follow-up.

My contact with the other three had various reactions. David White had predicted that there would be little feedback from Cornwall and, at the outset, Pat McCarthy had indicated that they would not wish to have a follow-up meeting, although this was also related, I thought, to a heightened suspicion about why Cornwall was "chosen". Throughout August she was away on holiday and despite messages to telephone me after her break, there was no response. In the first week of September I left my last message.

Certainly one of the problems, not only for directors of community councils but also for other staff members, was that, because they were working in such small groups, each individual represented a large percentage of the overall task. There was therefore considerable pressure on having one's job in order before going on holiday and then again on return to deal with a backlog. It was not possible for staff to cover for each other. At Cornwall, particularly, there was a very clear prioritizing of work in order to cope with demands, and obviously the Working Paper wasn't near the top of the pile.

In mid-August I spoke to Ann Parsons at Avon on the telephone and she apologised that she had "not looked inside the cover even though it is on the table in front of me". I had been quite taken aback by this response particularly as many of the more delicate issues in the research, and in the Working Paper, dealt with Avon

and here there had also been a very acute sense of privacy and confidentiality. My own feeling was that Ann Parsons would have been ripping the envelope off the outside in order to see what "secrets" I might have disclosed to the world. She promised to read it over the weekend and write to me. A letter arrived the following week:

20th August 1984

"Dear Alan,

Working Paper on Internal Issues

Further to your telephone call last week, I have spent some time over the weekend studying your most interesting report. When I got it out I realised that it had been put to one side as most things are around here until they become 'urgent'. Your phrase 'look over when the time permits' gave me far too much leeway and I had simply 'put it off'. It is a fascinating document, I certainly want to read it again, I cannot see my colleagues and Chairman getting to grips with it before September. I think it quite likely that we should appreciate a follow-up visit from you at some time.

I do hope that either the full document or a summary paper will be submitted to the SRCC Review Body and to Mr. Alan Leavett, who is conducting the D.C. Review of RCCS.

May I take up one or two issues with you that are in the nature of gut reactions."

She went on then to pick up on specific issues and a couple of minor points of fact.

Firstly, there was the matter of Committee members: "selection", as I had called it often amounted to being "lumbered with" and it was a difficult one to get around. Secondly, she thought that, with regards roles in meetings, they should look closely at what I was saying. Finally, she couldn't understand why I hadn't taken

issue about Directors' salaries as much as I had about Field Officers and Deputies. The answer to this was simple: during the course of my interviews where salary was an ongoing theme, Directors' salaries had not been mentioned. The interesting thing, therefore, was why not?

The letter closed by saying that she would pass the document on to her colleagues "as soon as they return from holiday/are not so hard pressed with urgent work". On the telephone the previous week she'd expressed graver reservations as to whether "it would be fair to pass it onto her staff "just now when they are so busy". I left it with Ann to decide on this and to invite me for a further meeting if they wished it. Had the time factor for me been different, I would have not only pushed for such a meeting, but perhaps explored the Director's reticence about passing it on.

The Leicestershire feedback was the most (to me) intriguing of all. When I met with David White during July and he was enquiring as to whether I'd heard from anyone, his main concern appeared to be with Brian Taylor. Leicester was again going through changes: the field officer had offered his resignation and in the interim, Brian was not only having to canvass for a suitable replacement but also covering the vacant position himself.

Over August I left several phone messages with his secretary and with no response, my own fantasy was that even on revision possibly the bits about familial dynamics in the Working Paper and hardly disguised comments about the exhaustive review process had somehow offended. When I completed my first draft thesis I was unable to say any more than that.

Then on the day after my final discussion about revisions to my draft (in October) I received a telephone call from Brian Taylor. He was very apologetic that he hadn't called me before but he felt so guilty that he hadn't read my paper. He had now done so and felt that it "had really pinpointed the issues in the community councils and had been very valuable to him indeed". He then proceeded to bring me up to date with current events which focussed again on the traditional v. development issue and Meg Shotton's future.

While he had been involved in the field officer issue, Meg had approached the Chairman to discuss her own future in that she now had decided not to retire in March 1985 as had been agreed previously. (As she wasn't Director the issue of retirement age was different: no agreement had been reached as to the retirement age for Deputies.) The chairwoman had swung around to see Meg's point of view and between them - Chairwoman, Director, Executive Committee - a decision had been left "pending" for four months. Here was the perfect example of where the lack of clarity in authority between Chairman/Director provides the opportunity for splitting and illustrates the overall conflict that emerges when it is.

My advice was that he and the Chairwoman needed to meet immediately to discuss the issues on either side (they hadn't done this in all that time) and if the authority of the Executive Committee in the end was the decision factor, then they should make a recommendation to the Committee which, presumably, would concur with their decision and a decision made which, however painful for whichever party, must be adhered to.

The likely outcome was that the Chairwoman and Director would not agree, in which event they would have to present each case to the Committee and a vote taken to decide. The worst event of all at present, it seemed to me, was indecision. Brian's reticence to go to Committee for a final decision was that it appeared that Meg had already swung the hearts of a good majority and it looked like he'd already lost. The voluntary/professional fight and the 'tug o' war' over community council direction - not to mention the personal battles and struggle for authority - was going to continue. A great pity, we agreed, that they hadn't seen this one coming.

The final piece of follow-up was with the Rural Department and, as agreed, I wrote a summary paper of issues with additional comments on the implications for training. This document is included as Appendix 11. The Rural Department said that they thought this would be extremely useful when they got their "Review" under way (the date for this was now November) although they might fine it down even more as they thought that the theoretical points at the beginning might distract from the practical issues. I said that I was happy for them to edit it in any way they wanted.

In retrospect, the Working Paper may have been too long, especially as the community councils have to deal with large quantities of written material and it was probably because it was written in any case that the impact of issues in it was softened. A series of meetings would have focussed the attention more and there were two problems in this: timing and the cost of doing it that way.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSION

XII. "INDEPENDENT" AND "VOLUNTARY" RECONSIDERED

One of the tasks of management of any organization is that of managing the boundary between it and the outside world. While it may be seen as a two- (or even three-) way task the aspects of dependence, independence and interdependence are central to the inter- and intra-organizational dynamics, central to the tensions and stresses that exist between and within them and hence to what is having to be managed.

While 'membership' may consist of both voluntary and statutory representatives, statutory membership appears to be confined to intra-county authorities. Some RCCs have a membership consisting entirely of voluntary representatives (such as Staffordshire), others, Cornwall for example, may have a majority of statutory members on the executive committees.

The issue of 'independence' is not unrelated to parenthood and hence to some feelings of ownership that exists in the organizations concerned. This, in its turn, relates to the question of ongoing support.

The creation of rural community councils did not emerge entirely out of a local concern for the quality of life in the county. It came from a local initiative of local voluntary organizations in conjunction with a need that came from the country as a whole and its government as a reaction and response to both local and national needs at the end of the First World War. This had changed drastically the conditions of the voluntary sector, through the

decrease of available private charity as well as the increases in demands for public support. This change in circumstances gave rise to the birth of the National Council for Social Service, in part to provide greater coordination of voluntary services, and this in its turn had seen the need to have corresponding bodies at county level in as many counties as possible. Neither local initiative on its own nor a national 'idea' could have given birth to the first RCCs.

Embodied in this original idea, for various reasons, was that while it was recognised that the RCCs would need external support over a limited period, they would, after three years, be supported by local voluntary funds (by the rural communities themselves) and therefore were regarded as 'independent' with temporary support from the UK Carnegie Trust during a short period of infancy. It became clear very early on, however, that Rural Community Councils would not draw sufficient local funding to survive independently, but where there was a recognised and growing role, not merely locally but also nationally, it was not desirable to allow them to perish. Further "temporary" support was forthcoming.

To some extent then, the term 'independent' is a legacy of the original idea rather than the reality of life. Certainly, if the survival of each RCC is related to continued Development Commission support, then independence is a somewhat confused issue, to say the least.

Autonomy of the management structure is an important dimension of the independence of the Rural Community Councils. From the time of their conception, a management structure revolving around

the executive body, gave the community councils an independence of action. This executive committee is empowered to decide upon the work of the council in conjunction with the secretary (or chief officer or director). The precise nature of this decision making process within the councils, i.e. the relationship between the executive committees and the directors, appears to have been left for each council, in their autonomous position, to decide upon. It seems that many councils, at least in the past, but still quite clearly in the present, have not addressed themselves to the lack of clarity in authority and responsibility terms between these positions (focussing particularly on directors and chairmen).

At the time of the original idea, it appears that it was envisaged that the bulk of the work to be done by community councils would revolve around the provision of resources for local associations, which would in turn allow the councils to be self-sufficient. This task, generally referred to as the 'traditional work', includes the agency work.

Statutory bodies, the Development Commission and Local Governments, have also been able to use the resources of the RCCs in doing work that they would need to do through their own resources, and for this the statutory bodies have provided funding to the community councils. The nature of this funding might be seen to fall into (for the sake of simplicity) one of three categories: money paid to community councils to do work on behalf of the DC, i.e. non-discretionary funding, in which the RCC is being paid to do a particular job; secondly, grant money provided to the RCC to do work at its own discretion, including its initiatory work; thirdly, funding that is provided for work that is seen to relate

to the shared tasks of the statutory bodies and the community councils. While it may be said that all the work of the community councils is of this third kind, at some level, much of the pressure exerted from the latter half of the seventies has come from a recognition that before then there was an emphasis on the second kind which was bound up in the constitutional autonomy of the council management structures. There is obviously still a large degree of conflict about the issues of autonomy and accountability between the organizations concerned, and this is exacerbated by the split between the paid and voluntary staff within the community councils: that while the paid staff may see quite clearly their responsibilities to, say, the Development Commission (though here there are issues about who is paid by the Development Commission and who isn't), the voluntary staff, in seeing themselves as a voluntary body, see this as being an interference in their autonomy. This then relates to the question about community councils being voluntary organizations, as against organizations that use voluntary support.

A further aspect of the independence of voluntary organizations, or the voluntary sector, is to do with the traditional 'experimental' and 'initiatory' role that it has played in the sphere of social services. All of the social services that are provided under statutory bodies today have, particularly in the course of the growth of cities in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, moved into the public sector from initiatory work of private charity, which goes back to feudal obligations and unemployment relief provided by the monasteries before their dissolution. While this is a very complex area and still has bearing on the culture of voluntary provision today (and includes the remnants

of Victorian philanthropy and the roles of the churches), there is, nevertheless, a recognition that this independent role of voluntary services is important (as underlined in the Wolfenden Report) and, moreover, is a right protected by law.

Underneath this desire for independence on the part of the Rural Community Councils, are the interests of the other parties. With dependence comes not merely a degree of control, but also a range of mutual responsibilities and obligations which parent organizations (e.g. DC or local governments) do not wish to take on: the obligation as employers to meet the needs of subsidiary bodies and their staffs and thus having increasing drains on their own resources, particularly when these are being diminished from above, rather than expanded. It is a government policy, according to Margaret Black, that where more than 50% of an organization's funding comes from government sources, then that organization should be under the control of the particular government department responsible. The Development Commission does not want overall responsibility for the community councils and this partly is behind their anxiety concerning the increasing proportion of RCC finance that comes from it, which at present (in most cases) is approximately 60%.

The 'independence', then, appears to be in part a reminder rather than a reality, and a boundary clarification on the part of the statutory bodies and the NCVO about the limits of their obligations, both at the time of their inception when there was concern about the demands on public resources as more social services moved into the statutory sector from the voluntary sector, and

today in the climate of shrinking public finance. Ironically, there are less resources available for support to the community councils from the supporting bodies when they are all under most stress and it therefore appears that the felt stress increases geometrically at each step away from central government: community councils experience not merely an increase in stress but also a shrinking of support, as do, to a lesser extent, the NCVO, local authorities and the Development Commission.

The desire for independence also comes from the community councils themselves. There is inevitably a desire on the part of any organization or system, as discussed by Capra (1982), for its own autonomy and freedom of action, which is a need both in the exercise of task and also in the emotional life of the organization. This autonomy as discussed in Chapter III and by Thompson (1967), is related to the issue of organizational power. Going back to the original plan wherein the community councils were to have a supported infancy period of three years and then to graduate to 'adulthood' and independence, circumstances have not made this latter phase a reality and independence not achieved. What has happened in this in-between relationship is a suspended and ongoing period of adolescence of community councils in relation to the statutory bodies and it is to some extent experienced like that, not necessarily focussed on individuals but on the group-as-a-whole dynamic. The 'fight' that is involved in this struggle is between the needs for dependence and independence as discussed, for example, by Bowlby (1979).

A further aspect of this issue of independence relates to the 'neutrality' of community councils, which is necessary not

only in terms of the need for an independence of viewpoint in looking at issues of rural development and welfare, acting and advising as they do between different rural and sometimes political interests, but also as a stipulation of their being registered charities and having to meet Charity Commission regulations. Here, however, the former need is most relevant: the role of being outside of any vested interest in advising and pointing to need in either direction, either upwards or downwards. This is not to say, however, that there aren't interests represented within and between the organizations, and these tensions are an important aspect of the dynamics of the community councils either as they are or as they are perceived to be.

Putting together than these aspects of financial support and decision making with the emotional life of the organizations concerned, (and the aspects of power in each of these), perhaps one of the most crucial aspects of dependence relates to survival: there is a powerful anxiety that community councils might be allowed to perish and that they are powerless to do anything about this from within. One needs to make a distinction here between realistic outcomes and fantasies, but within the emotional life of the organization, the difference, in looking at the effects, is not so important: the anxiety caused by the fantasy is as great unless it is examined and then dealt with by the rational. Until it is confronted as a fantasy, it has to be defended against as a real threat, either collectively or individually.

To some extent, I have felt that in many of my conversations, the constant reiteration of 'independence' and the confusion about

which aspect of independence is being talked about, is a defence against the anxieties about survival. It brings together, then, aspects of power and powerlessness, autonomy, infantilization and, most crucially, anxieties about survival, around which much organizational energy is inevitably expended. The holding or dissipation of this anxiety has to be a crucial aspect of the management task and this is where the relative isolation of community councils means that this is held rather than worked through. This holding is a constant drain on the energy of the community councils, but their directors in particular.

As has already been mentioned, one needs to consider aspects of interdependence and counterdependence. At one level the central organizations, the RCCs, the Rural Department, the Development Commission and the Local Governments, are engaged in a shared task and to that end there is a need for a cooperation between these, engaged in the work of rural development and the 'quality of rural life'. Each needs the other to do its job well in the shared task and in this, for example, the Development Commission uses the RCCs to do some of its work for it. The point was made most clearly here in reference to Norfolk where there is no community council, and where the Development Commission has found that it has been unable to achieve any of its own objectives in relation to rural development work.

At another level, however, one comes back to the dual task that organizations are involved in, as has been discussed in relation to the community councils, and that is the task of organizational survival. Towards the end of the seventies, the survival of all

the organizations referred to was brought to account under present government policy and the use of public funds, and in this the NCVO, the Development Commission and the local authorities, had need to look to their own survivals and to this end it meant also that the Rural Community Councils were to play an important part. Needless to say, it is quite clear that the increased pressure on RCCs has also been in the interests of their own survival. Had the RCCs resisted this and continued as they were working, drawing on their constitutional autonomy, and had consequently perished (as was a possibility) then this would certainly have placed the Rural Department and possibly the Development Commission in jeopardy. On examination, the reality either then or in retrospect may have been different, but each of the bodies who at some level, even if unconsciously, dealing with a survival issue. An important factor is that neither the Rural Department nor the Development Commission are vital to the survival of the organizations (the NCVO and the Government) of which they are part. To some extent then, the Development Commission and, to a greater extent the Rural Department have had needs of properly functioning Rural Community Councils, not just in terms of the shared task, but in terms of the question of their own survivals. Within the RCCs then, there is to some extent the feeling that the increased pressure to be 'more dynamic' and 'more professional' is not altogether to do with their own needs. What is lost sight of at times is that it is <u>also</u> a need of their own, and here the pressure is most felt, understandably, within the voluntary part of the councils but which has a large input into the dynamics of the whole.

This leads on to a consideration of Rural Community Councils as 'voluntary' organizations, which is closely related to the issues in their independence. The constant underlining of their belonging within the voluntary sector, rather than their being intermediary bodies as emphasised in the Wolfenden Report, has implications both for the relationships with outside organizations and for the internal working of the councils.

While the view that Rural Community Councils are voluntary organizations may have been appropriate at their inception in the twenties, it seems questionable as to whether that is appropriate now in view of the developments that have occurred beyond the 'traditional work' and the original view of how they would be supported. There needs to be some middle way wherein there is an acknowledgement of the developments that have occurred, the change from the original idea in the relationships with the statutory, while at the same time preserving the areas of independence that are crucial to the successful performance of its various tasks.

The management structure of the community councils appears also to be a confusing factor in how they (the councils) view themselves. Within the original idea, membership of the councils was to revolve around representations of local voluntary associations and within this there is for those members, at least, a confusion as to whether the RCCs themselves are a representation or conglomerate of those associations and groups, rather than being recognised as separate organizations. This confusion comes out most clearly in executive committeed where there appears in some instances (and much more in the past, it seems) a lack of clarity about the function

and roles of individuals: are they there as representatives of their individual organizations, or are they a governing body of something separate? This clarity appears to have been, and is being, achieved to varying degrees.

Volunteers and representatives of voluntary associations have a special relationship with the community councils which is a complex one but which needs to clarify the difference between the functions mentioned above, as this is at the centre of how the councils view themselves as a whole.

One of the shifts that councils mention often (as do the NCVO and the Development Commission) is the increased professionalization of the RCCs, which has been partly a response to the needs of survival which in turn has meant the employment of professional staff ('experts') in rural issues. One of the ongoing stresses, (possibly an interim one?) is the lag in the councils-as-a-whole shifting to view themselves in the way that the staff as a small group within the councils view themselves. From the outside, the view and expectations of the Rural Department and the Development Commission is in accord with the staff view rather than the 'whole council' view. Consequently, the expectations of the organizations, with the staffs of the community councils in the middle, are different, with varying views of what is unfair pressure, unreasonable expectations ("after all we are only volunteers and amateurs") and "interference in the RCCs".

The other issue within this is that of professional and voluntary workers working side by side. In none of the RCCs that I have visited is there confusion, at least in title, about who

are and aren't the staff, when speaking about the paid and voluntary members. There are, however, differing views about the secretarial and support staff being staff or non-staff, even within the same body. In practice, however, the function of the volunteer support varied and this at times appears to overlap with staff function. This, for instance, occurs in Cornwall, but with it goes a very clear underlining of the delegatory aspect of this which maintains the clarity between staff and non-staff.

One of the crucial outcomes of paid and non-paid working together, is that salary itself becomes an uncomfortable issue, which is exacerbated by the view that staff are working for a voluntary organization and the amount of pay should therefore not be an issue. This has recently, however, been taken up within the Standing Conference and there is a working party looking into this.

It must be made clear here that I am aware that while I am drawing a division (which exists) between the voluntary and the paid sectors of the RCCs, it does not follow that if you happen to be a volunteer then you will see it one way and if you are paid you will see it another. Indeed, much of the clarity about the changes and developments within the community councils come from those who have a long history with the councils themselves in a voluntary capacity and have facilitated in some of the more difficult areas of staff pay. Similarly, there is a strong feeling within the paid staff groups that the demands and expectations that go with doing the task well (this is particularly relevant to the Countryside Officers) are not commensurate with the remuneration.

The issue of task and sentient boundaries, as discussed by Miller and Rice (1967) is very relevant here when considering the implications of professional and voluntary staff working side by side, or for professionals working for voluntary organizations. In purely voluntary organizations - or in looking at the role of the volunteer - the boundary between personal and working life is not clear or may not exist at all because one's work is, to some extent, one's private life: it is the giving of one's self. This is a central aspect of the voluntary culture and for the professional working within this, the clarification of boundary between personal and working life may not only be difficult to achieve, but may also be met with resistance.

The issue of dependence (and therefore independence and interdependence) is a central one and, because of the nature of the environment that either an organization or individual works within, there are not necessarily readily available answers to increasing one's power in relation to that environment. At least, however, an understanding of those forces that do exist in inter- and intra-organizational life will in itself reduce the stress of the ongoing situation because such understanding will mean that there is some sense about what is happening to one either as a group or as an individual, and it is only with such an understanding that one might know how a system may need to change in order to create a healthier dynamic balance with the environment and other organizations within it.

XIII. EPILOGUE

This study has provided an ideal opportunity to examine the various levels of intra- and inter-organizational life which were outlined in the beginning and, in particular, how in relation to one another the dynamic balances and imbalances provide the background to stress both in relation to breakdown and also to growth.

Two sets of needs created the opportunity for the present work, my own and those of the NCVO and the RCCs, and the documentation within this thesis relates possibly more to the former than to the latter. A lot of the material contained in this is not available to those other than individuals interviewed and even though names have been changed, in a working network individuals are easily identified. The purpose for my own study has been to analyse the interactions within and between organizations where there is a necessary degree of interdependence within a changing environment. Some aspects of it have made fieldwork difficult, however, particularly aspects of time, place and money.

In relation to the needs of the NCVO and the RCCs it is, ironically, the very factors which have been identified as contributing to stress and overload that not only make the working environment a difficult one to manage and with which to remain in a dynamic balance, but also contribute most of all to the inability of organizations to reflect on structure, function and task.

In a project where there are, as in this instance, two sets of overlapping needs, it may mean that one set can be denied: that the reluctance for the organizations to look at themselves and their tasks and functions can be resisted and this resistance be explained away, not necessarily consciously, by a feeling that it was they who were doing me the favour in the first place: a recognition of need presupposes an acknowledgement of a problem and this is only recognised in certain quarters.

Similarly, another "voluntary" contribution (mine) to organizational life may also be bound to fail for two reasons. Firstly, as it does not cost the community councils, it is possible that what it represents - in this case the need to look at how the organization operates in relation to its task in the environment - is not taken sufficiently seriously. This cost is not necessarily just financial although that is one dimension: the needs to have some investment from the outset and by having negotiations carried out between myself and the NCVO it was to take some time for the RCCs (as groups) themselves to discover or recognise an investment of their own. By the time this had developed in two of them at least - Avon and Leicestershire - I was no longer available to facilitate in this myself.

A second type of investment or cost is that of time and this is an area where I feel there is a lesson for the researcher. In approaching RCCs in the first instance I was careful not to demand too much of their time but in retrospect this may have been poorly judged because I was colluding with the very thing that they were suffering from and perpetuating an ongoing cycle: the

reason given, whether explicit or implicit, to look at task, function and process was that the demands of the job didn't allow the time for this. Without a clear commitment - and some cost - in relation to time, the situation was bound to be perpetuated.

The issues that the RCCs (or the NCVO) wanted exploring from the outset were twofold: firstly, an examination of the stresses that RCCs were working under, which is covered in this thesis in considerable detail and a systems approach, I have found, has been most useful, and secondly; there was the question raised about the implications for training and development.

Discussion about this has not been included in this thesis although it is included in the paper written for the NCVO - Development Commission review (Appendix II). One of the crucial issues here in either intra- or inter-organizational life is to do with available resources. The need for both the Rural Department and the RCCs, with changes in the seventies, was to increase the professional expertise in rural issues and while this has been crucial, an almost total concentration on this has possibly been detrimental to looking at management and organizational issues in terms other than expertise about rural issues. I say 'possibly' because while it is indisputable that looking at organizational issues only in those terms is detrimental on one level, it may be also inevitable in the real life of organizational development and, in terms of what Von Bertalanffy describes as 'equifinality' in the development process, not inconsistent with "healthy" growth. There isn't necessarily a predetermined order of developmental stages that are passed through en route to maturity. One is not examining rural community councils today as the mature organization.

The shape of rural community council development in the seventies and eighties is a product of a reaction to what they were like in the fifties and sixties. And while they were, in the fifties and sixties, the same as they were in the twenties and thirties, the environment was a different one and therefore while appropriate in the latter, they were inappropriate in the former.

Nevertheless, while development is a reaction - an antithesis or revolution - the constructive synthesis is the stage that is around the corner. By then, of course, environmental factors will have shifted yet again.

Both history, and an understanding of past development, and projections into the future play important and dynamic parts in current organizational life. This I have found clearly in this instance though an exploration of this was prompted by an initial suspicion that this was so, although the suspicion was driven by an awareness that events in history were shaping the present, not only for me but for those who could not explain to me why things were like they were.

Furthermore, history is not just about grand events. Historians write about World Wars and economic recessions and through these one can trace or pinpoint changes in circumstances for large societies. But equally so, for small societies, such as the organizations in this study, small events may play a large part in future development but, because they are not recorded, their part is not appreciated. In many societies these are handed down

through myths, legends and story telling. In this study I have, in the end, uncovered apparently minor events which have played major parts in later organizational life.

An ex-colleague of mine was telling me that his mother always cut the bottom four inches off a leg of pork before putting it in the oven. It was only after a vehement argument with his own wife many years later, when he was insisting that the 'right' way to cook a leg of pork was to chop the end off it, that he realised that in the light of day it didn't make all that much sense.

On asking his own mother about it, she herself insisted that cutting the end off the leg was what was needed although she didn't know why herself. But her mother had always done it (and that was AUTHORITY).

Grandmother had by this time, unfortunately, passed on and could not be consulted on the issues but much later one of the aunts was able to provide the vital explanation. "It's simple", she said. "Gran always cut the end off the pork and it did make it cook better. The thing was, she only had a small roasting pan and the only way to get it in was to cut the end off it."

Maybe organizations are a bit like that too.

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APPENDIX I. NOTES ON WORKING PAPER

Note 1. Avon and Cornwall Community Councils.

Note 2. Comments made by voluntary members in meetings I have attended bear this out. On one visit to an RCC, Margaret Black from the Development Commission, found that she had to explain to the Executive Committee what the role of the Development Commission was.

Note 3. This has been an experience of the Rural Department, while RCC directors are aware that this has happened.

Note 4. Cornwall and Leicestershire, for example.

Note 5. This was the experience of the director at Leicester prior to their Review.

Note 6. This has been the experience of the two voluntary members I met with at Avon and also evident from comments made in meetings at Staffordshire.

Note 7. An issue in the Staffordshire Executive Committee. Of the thirty five members, only sixteen were present at the meeting I attended and, of these, eight slept at some point during the two hour meeting.

Note 8. Leicester prior to 1982.

Note 9. In Avon, for example, where the rural population is small compared to the urban population and where the Labour County Council is, according to those in the RCC, focussing its resources on the inner-city problems, particularly following the race riots in 1982.

Note 10. A comment made by two professional staff in RCCs.

Note 11. Avon and Staffordshire, for example.

Note 12. A comment made by the field officer at Staffordshire, where there are now just two professional workers based at the RCC.

Note 13. I have experienced this both within and without the RCCs.

Note 14. Interview, Director Avon Community Council.

Note 15. Views of what had happened in two of the community councils in this study, but under previous directors: Leicestershire and Staffordshire.

Note 16. Interview, Chairman, Avon Community Council.

Note 17. Trist and Murray (1951) use the absenteeism factor as a measure of stress.

Note 18. I raised this with the Chairman at Cornwall and he agreed that it was something they must consider, but there is some confusion then with the 'voluntary' role.

Note 19. ... and may also expect to fill this role. This was a point included in the initial draft of the working paper but removed because it may be difficult for the community council concerned (Leicestershire). I felt that the disappointment at not having been given the director's position had been coped with by this particular deputy by taking on the maternal role. During our interview when asked about subsequent relationship with a younger director the comment was made on two or three occasions that he (the new director) was "the same age as my son", the inference being that she could help him develop in the same way. Here is an example of transference in the working relationship.

Note 20. A point made in reference to retiring officers but also clear in discussions with those who had to come to terms with the disappearance of prospects.

Note 21. At Avon, for example, though the reasons for this are complex and is related to the difficulties about Principal Assistants.

Note 22. Competition over secretarial time, including arguments about whose work was more important, was mentioned in two of the councils.

Note 23. At both Cornwall and Staffordshire where staff worked under previous chief officers, there was a strict limitation on expanding function.

Note 24. It was mentioned both by David White and by one of the deputies that, up to the last few years, the expectation was that field officers would gain valuable experience (but not much pay) and then move on. However, the high turnover of field officers was also lamented, particularly by directors, who then had to work with relatively inexperienced staff in a demanding job.

Note 25. Interview, Director, Staffordshire.

Note 26. One secretary became most uncomfortable when this was raised and said that that was really none of her business. If that was happening, then she would rather not know about it as it would make things more difficult. I didn't know whether that meant that she still didn't know about it even after my comment, but I think it did.

APPENDIX II.

FROM CONSULTING PAPER WRITTEN FOR THE NCVO, SEPTEMBER 1984

Implications for Training, Support and Development

1. The management task of organizations may be seen to relate to three different, but interacting, areas: the task, the people and the technology.

2. Each of the three areas above can be examined with respect to the different hierarchical levels of interacting systems: the individual person, the group, the single organization, the multi-organizational system.

3. The terms 'support', 'training' and 'development' are used in different, but not consistent, ways.

4. 'Training' tends to imply skills development, though in some situations it is used as a general term for any development on an individual level (whereas 'development' is an organizational term).

5. 'Support' implies the alleviation of stress in situations of overload, either in a practical way (using the extra hand) or in a psychological sense. The aim in 'support' is to redress an imbalance in a system in order to maintain it at a particular stage.

6. 'Development' implies growth beyond a present level in anticipation of changing environmental circumstances or in order to create a different impact on a relatively stable one. The keyword, however, would appear to be growth and I would use this in relation to any level of the systems referred to above: individual person and organization etc.

7. In this paper I use the word 'development' also as a generic word for all three, unless I am referring to one of them specifically.

8. Rural Community Council development over the past five years appears to have focussed primarily on the expansion of organizational function and the development of the skills, knowledge and expertise in the area of rural issues. This is reflected in

(or vice versa) in the resources available in the Rural Department.

9. Over the past twelve months some RCCs have begun to examine the technology in relation to the expansion of function.

10. The area that I am focussing on in this paper is the 'people' system, which appears so far to have come third.

11. In diagnosing the needs for development in a particular situation, the initial task is to identify the points of stress and need in the interacting systems.

12. Stress must be seen as one factor in relation to another: an imbalance must involve at least two elements. The redress of imbalance depends on which elements in the interacting systems are capable of change. For example, financial input : output. Each system in one way or another imposes limitations on each of the others and this includes people, technology, functions, culture, finance, politics, geography etc.

13. In alleviating stresses there are two possibilities: one must consider where change is possible (or necessary); secondly, in many situations, an understanding of the dynamics and therefore the sources of stress can alleviate the effects. This at least can make situations explicable and alleviate the feelings of individual inadequacy. (But this may not be enough, however).

14. The provision of the space to explore the various aspects of one's working environment (a) provides a greater understanding of the whole and therefore the pressures one is working under; (b) it allows the exploration of what can or can't change; (c) this facilitates personal and organizational development; (d) having identified what can change it is then possible to look at the constructive ways of going about it; (e) it creates a constructive space for the exploration of conflict and this in itself limits the spillage into other areas of the work.

15. The above (14) points to the need for a support and development space in the staff group itself. This stands alongside the exploration of role and function mentioned elsewhere and are the two 'internal' development areas I see most in demand.

16. A task of management is to decide what is most appropriate in each type of development situation: where should it be held? Who is it for? And so on. (Getting these answers right can make a very big difference and the reasons need to be clear.)

17. Particularly in organizations which are more dependent on external situations as RCCs are in political and economic terms, but don't have access to them, the nature of external pressures are often difficult to understand when they affect the dynamics of the internal structure. In these circumstances, an internal object (person) can be scapegoated for the externally caused stress. Alternatively, groups which are unable to work through an internal conflict may defend against this by projecting the 'fault' onto an outside body (M. Klein, 1954).

18. Outside assistance is almost certainly needed to at least initiate staff groups, and preferable if this can be ongoing for some time. It needs the help of someone who is outside the staff dynamic, but the possibilities for obtaining this are worthy of exploration. Here are some possibilities:

Can RCCs buy two hours per week of management consultancy time over six months or a year?

Explore local management consultancy resources in relation to this?

Some CVS organizations use management consulting services.

Some university departments (e.g. Urban Studies at Bristol) offer consulting services to voluntary bodies such as the CVS.

Some of the larger corporations (e.g. IBM) are offering either services and finance for management development in the voluntary sector (though I would suggest that the RCCs should be clear about their own needs first... "management consultancy" comes under various guises.

RCCs may find the assistance of a retired professional/ manager who may be able to offer assistance (preferably without becoming part of the RCC in another function and therefore remain at a distance from ongoing dynamics.)

19. Secondly, there is the area of external conferences workshops and training programmes. As has been mentioned, a diagnosis of needs should occur before time and money is invested in external conferences, which may form various functions.

20. Ideally, the development of the staff group begins from within, but this may feel too threatening or is blocked in various ways (if this is the case then importing the value of an external conference can be a problem). In such cases, however, only going outside the organization itself may provide a starting point wherein working with "strangers" in exploring certain issues may feel safer.

21. Not all issues are usefully examined as a staff group. For example, there are issues that are relevant to particular positions in the organization and it may be inappropriate to work through many issues within the group. Issues of boundary management or the relative functions of chairman and director (e.g.) would be more appropriately explored at a conference/workshop for directors and chairmen.

22. There are various possibilities for joint workshops and conferences (which are looked at below) apart from the areas that are presently considered. The MDU at the NCVO offer training courses in, for example, "the management of small groups", which directors of RCCs would find useful. At present, the management issues tend to be defined only by what is specifically relevant to rural issues.

23. RCC development/support/training at present appears to be limited by various factors: (a) it is seen in terms only of 'rural development' issues rather than, e.g., working groups; (b) the resources available in the Rural Department, which needs to become aware of the possibilities of what is offered elsewhere both in the NCVO and outside (as do RCCs); (c) Finance available: within the strictures of a tight budget, staff development is seen as a low priority and wasteful rather than as an investment; (d) the voluntary culture which tends to regard 'self development', particularly where it costs money, as contrary to the spirit of voluntary service and the putting of others first; (e) the time available for either thinking about or being involved in

development: I would reiterate that it would pay for itself multifold; (f) the indifference to 'development' for many who are unsure about their futures with RCCs; (g) the distances that many feel they have to travel, especially when courses focus on London.

24. I conclude with a list of possible workshops that may not be on current agendas and add that they are ideas that come off the top of my head with the intention of provoking thought rather than as concrete recommendations. (Nevertheless, there is a note of seriousness in this list):

Individuals:	Exploring aspects of stress; Function and role; Career development; Training in specific skills.
Group issues:	Role and function: individual and group. Exploring multiple roles, role conflicts etc. Exploring other functions in the organization. Voluntary and professional functions.
Organizational: (inc. management issues)	The role and function of RCCs in a changing environment. The changing function in relation to specific tasks. Independence, Authority, Accountability and Responsibility. The relationship between the voluntary and statutory sectors. Developing the voluntary role. Working in small groups.